OBJECTIVE HISTORY
AND THE INDIVIDUAL HISTORIAN

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I declare that this thesis was composed by me and embodies the results of my own work.

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SUMMARY

Two features of true history must be reconciled: objectivity and the historian's individuality. History is defined as the story of man's past in its particular aspect. Historical knowledge has a straightforward inferential basis, made clearer by an examination of source-materials. Relativist arguments are not successful, but value-judgments have a place in history. There cannot be a common interpretation, and committed history can be objective. General history is an ideal, giving scope for the historian's individuality. Generalizations have a restricted function; history is not a social science but should have a useful relationship with the social sciences. Various types of explanation are valid in history and are connected with selection and the concept of significance. Historical understanding has some special features: intuition is especially important. Understanding, interpretation and the historian's thesis are significantly related. Much written history has a literary character, contributing to genuine knowledge and understanding, notably through the historian's conception of his work and his relationship with his readers. Objectivity in history has limits, and interpretation has a character of its own. There is a point to the study of history.

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I

INTRODUCTION

1. Individuality and objectivity in history

The aim of this dissertation is simply stated: it is to reconcile the individuality of the historian with the necessity for historical objectivity. In the past many thinkers have held that the individuality of the historian is a paramount consideration in the writing of history; but in their efforts to promote the significance of the historian they have allowed, explicitly or implicitly, that because of this paramountcy of the historian's individuality, the achievement of complete objectivity in historical work must be seen as impossible. For some thinkers, it is true, the loss to history of objectivity is to the general benefit of the consideration of past events; for others, however, it is thought of as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of their theories of history.

Of course, there is no universal agreement that if there really is a conflict between the individual historian and historical objectivity in historical work, then the maintenance of the historian's individuality must be held to be superior to the attainment of objectivity. As I have already said, many people decide the apparently irresoluble conflict between individuality and objectivity by putting

individuality first; but perhaps equally as many wish to maintain objectivity at the expense of the historian's individuality: in the historical consideration of past events it is claimed by these people that objectivity is of the first importance, and in order to attain this objectivity, individuality in approach and method together with the personality of the historical worker, however manifested, must be eradicated from (or better, not even be permitted to enter into) any true historical account. The absence of individuality is to be ensured either by doing history through a group of which the members will have a certain anonymity (for example, through a committee or through collaborative work), or by applying well-proved general principles to history (since such general principles would allow objective theoretical criticism from other workers on a sound, universally accepted, scientific basis). The question, therefore, that I wish to answer in the following pages is: Can the historian's individuality be reconciled with objectivity in historical work? Or, can the historian with no unfair restraint to his individuality give us a sound objective account of the past?

Indeed, I hope to go further than simply to answer these questions in the affirmative. My intention is to indicate the scope of objectivity in historical work and its interaction with the historian's individuality, and in addition to show the special importance for historical understanding of the historian as a particular individual.

Before my intention as I have stated it here can be examined and argued closely and directly, some preliminary problems connected with history must be looked at and dealt with. I propose in this dissertation, therefore, to establish first a definition of history, for it is indisputably, and unfortunately, the case that the way in which history has been defined has changed in a significant way several times in the past; and it is true too that at the present time working historians themselves have one of several current definitions of history in mind (perhaps not very consciously) when they are engaged in their studies. Most definitions of history, when their ramifications and implications are developed and realized, are not fully compatible with each other. Consequently, it is necessary, at the beginning of any discussion which is going to be centred on the nature of history, to make it very clear how "history" is to be defined for that discussion.

However, I do not intend that my definition of history shall be an arbitrary one; while allowing that there may be a need for some of the potentially separate disciplines which today compete for the name of history to have an existence in their own right -- and they are "disciplines" at least in sketched outlines -- I am confident, and intend to show, that our concept of the past entails that there be some sort of discipline, complete in itself, which shall correspond to "history" according to the definition that I accept and argue for, and for historical reasons this discipline has the best

claim to the name of "history". It will be this definition of history with which I shall be concerned in my examination of the problems connected with the individual historian and historical objectivity.

Once a concept of "history" has been satisfactorily defined, the historian's purposes must be looked at; and after this I intend to attempt a clarification of the nature of the historian's knowledge and the materials through which he comes by that knowledge. It will be seen that the purposes of historical work are actually determined by its nature; and the methods of a particular historian will be decided to an important extent (although by no means exclusively) by his beliefs about the purpose of his work.

Nature, purpose, and methodology are all closely connected; and the purpose of any particular instance of historical work, as that is conceived by the historian, has a close and important bearing on the objectivity of the work. In a significant number of instances it can be shown that when we reject a work of history because its lack of objectivity mars its description and explanation of the facts, this rejection can be more or less directly attributed to a faulty conception of the purpose of history on the part of its author.

The question of the relation of purpose and objectivity is, however, a very extensive one. A faulty conception of purpose will sometimes give rise to a narrative that is obviously incorrect and on that account

historically unacceptable. More importantly, a historian's conception of historiographical purpose is both a product of the whole complex of problems connected with historical relativism and itself a causal factor in that complex. The historian's ideas about the possibility of historical objectivity will have a significant effect on his ideas about his own purpose in writing history; likewise, his conception of the purpose, or function, or value of a historical account will reinforce his belief in the objectivity of historical work or confirm his convictions that historiography must be relative to its age and the value of its results no more than ephemeral. The complexity of relativist problems necessitates a reasonably full treatment of relativism and historical objectivity; it is here that the main topic of this work, that is to say, the importance of the individual historian in historical work, together with an examination of the relationship between his individuality and objectivity, is first treated, for it is in the context of relativism that many of the arguments against the primacy of the individual historian in historical work are to be found.

Thoughts that historical work is somehow inherently counter-objective are produced by many factors present in the methods that historians must use in dealing with the past, and by essential characteristics of the historical past itself and the subject-matter of history. There are two main clusters of problems centring on features which seem to militate against objectivity in history: there are

problems arising on the one hand from the individuality of the historical worker and the psychological and social conditioning of his personality as he expresses it in his work, and on the other hand from the non-scientific, non-generalizing character of history. So it is that the characteristics of the historian have to be examined; and it will be necessary to look at some of the problems of objectivity which originate in one of the aspects of the way in which historical work is done. History is still largely researched and written by the individual historian. Although at the more "basic" historical levels a large amount of work is done by various working-groups and similar impersonal bodies, the "terminal" historical work, the full-fledged historical narrative, is still the almost exclusive province of the individual historian, with all the abundant problems of personal bias, psychological and social conditioning, and other apparently counter-objective factors apparently necessarily attendant on this state of affairs. It is the very personal side of the finished historical narrative which for many philosophers and historians ensures that the historical work of an individual historian cannot be objective but must be inevitably coloured, and irremediably so, by the individual's point of view.

Some thinkers find the relativist's objections in respect of the individual historian to be well founded, but they believe that these objections can be overcome by the propagation of methods of "group" history, that is to say,

historical work carried out completely through comprehensive collaboration or by some sort of historiographical committee. Other thinkers, however, have come to the conclusion that, for group history, any objections to historical work carried out by an individual can be paralleled by similar objections for any sort of "committee history": the group as a whole has relativist features created for it by its orientation to a particular period of time (to a particular era), and by the assumptions underlying the social and cultural milieu in which the individuals of the historiographical group have been brought up, assumptions which must determine the basic conceptual structure of the group's work, even in so far as its members may consciously strive to work against these assumptions. Objections to historical objectivity founded on relativism still remain after those objections based on the psychologically conditioned individuality of historical workers have been refuted; and so they too must be subjected to an examination. I intend to look at these problems of relativism, and I hope to show that some of the relativist's assertions about history are unacceptable, while those which are acceptable do not necessarily compromise historical objectivity.

The relativist's argument against objectivity is founded on one limitation of the historian's vision, that limitation created by the historian's location in some society at some point in time. Another limitation provides a basis for a different argument against the individual

historian, that is, the inability of a single individual to cope with the sheer mass of the material relevant to the general consideration of almost any historical topic. In support of this argument, and as an alternative to the general history that is thought to be impossible, some writers advocate the development of specialized forms of history. Against this I shall assert that any particular historical topic, for the deepest understanding, must be looked at in its totality; thus, the term "general history" has to be defined and shown to be the genuine and most complete objective of historical work, while an examination of some of the forms of specialized history should demonstrate that these specialized forms are subsidiary to history pure and simple. On the other hand, what might be thought of as the "extreme" of general history, that is, universal history, will be seen on account of its inadequacy to be an invalid form of complete history. The necessity for the use of the divisions of period and region within general history is in this way made evident.

An ideal of a type of historical work which moves away from the particular and towards generalized statements is a fully tenable concept. But in the consideration of problems of relativism and objectivity in historical work, references will have been made to the fact that history, unlike both the physical sciences and the social sciences, is not orientated towards the general. The fundamental importance of the individual and particular in history has also been emphasized in the discussion of the nature of

history. This characteristic of history is so important that, although it can hardly be treated exhaustively, it must be dealt with at some length. It is an important characteristic with regard both to historical objectivity and to the individual historian, and therefore I shall have to spend some time in an examination of aspects of the particular and the general in connection with their significance for historical work. Because of this significance, it has to be stressed, and elaborated precisely, how the individual and particular is the primary topic of historical work. Therefore, the relationship between history and the social sciences has to be made explicit, and the place and form of generalizing in history need to be explained. In particular, the conception of general laws for historical work has to be looked at in some detail.

From the lack of general laws in history there arise, as it is claimed, certain well-known problems of historical methodology. On the one hand it has been asserted that, for the most part, there are no general laws in history, that history is largely a matter of dealing with unique events in what is basically, in the absence of a generally accepted theoretical system, a rough-and-ready, common-sense way: such a treatment of historical material will be largely determined by the individual personality of each historian; thus, the argument runs, history cannot possibly be an objective discipline. On the other hand, it has been claimed, as a refutation of this position, that historians,

however implicit it may be in their apparent method, do make use of general laws, that history is in significant respects scientific, and that consequently a claim of true objectivity can be made for historical work which has been carried out in a proper and acceptable way. For my part, I shall set out to show that the justifications of historical objectivity cannot be those of scientific objectivity, for scientific objectivity partly rests in the conformity of the explanation and interpretation of various particulars in terms of general principles which, as established, have somehow been cut free from the individual case. While there are a large number of general laws applying to history in fact, and not all of them truisms, history does not and cannot have that body of generalizations, and general laws and principles, which is essential for a scientifically justified objectivity; nor does history have that orientation towards the general which characterizes the true sciences. My intention is to demonstrate that history is concerned fundamentally with the unique and particular, and also to show that the consequences usually thought to be derived from the particular character of history do not follow; that is to say, quite simply, that facts about the particular provide both information that is objective and information that is worthwhile in terms of enduring human knowledge.

Once it has been established that history is the domain of the particular, the importance of the particular as such in the completed historical narrative must be

shown, together with what follows from this. Because history deals with the uniquely particular, explanation in history will be found to have a special character: in short, explanation has several markedly different and logically unrelated meanings in historical work. Because of the frequent absence of general laws of a universal, or even a probable, application, explanation is often not at all of the same kind as explanation in the physical and social sciences; the true relation between the general and the particular in history must be stated explicitly. In any case, for history analytic explanation is not the last stage in saying "why" events happened in the way that they did; full historical knowledge comes with the deeper understanding of events and their explanation. It must be shown that because of the special character of historical understanding, its effectiveness will depend very much on the individuality of the historical narrative and consequently on the personality of the historian who puts forward various statements as satisfactory explanations of historical events.

I intend too to examine at some length the nature of "insight" and "intuition" in their connection with historical work, the conception of history as an activity to which literary qualities are necessary, and the basis of historical understanding. When these ideas have been explored in some depth, the importance of the individual historian must be looked at once again, and this topic of the historian's individuality will then be developed and

expanded. It is the existence of individuality in historiography which ensures the presence of that style which constitutes such an important medium of historical work. The significance of literary style in history will therefore need to be examined; and the importance of literary qualities in developed historical narratives must be emphasized.

Historical objectivity is not necessarily compromised by the individuality of the historian who carries out his work conscientiously. I intend to show in detail -- convincingly, I hope -- how this can actually prove to be the case; and, more, I shall set out to demonstrate how the concept of historical knowledge essentially contains the idea of a deeply held point of view, and how individuality in historical authorship and historical understanding is in fact very largely indispensable, perhaps not for the entire conception of history, but certainly for a very great number of instances of written history. It is through individual insight and the developed historical experience of the historian that we finally come to understand the events of man's past with a fullness of meaning.

2. History and philosophy

One fundamental objection that might be advanced against the development of my argument in the pages to come is that in some cases where it touches on philosophical problems it passes them by without going into them in

sufficient depth. Certainly from the viewpoint of "pure" philosophy this objection would seem to possess some justification. And so it must be stressed that in this dissertation I am not concerned with certain problems of philosophy that may possess a logical connection with history but with problems in the philosophy of history as it deals with history proper. These latter problems, I should wish to hold, are in some way either peculiarly historical or very closely related with history as it is practised. For the most part I shall not be giving much attention to those problems which, while they can be found in history, also pervade our whole experience; these problems originate in our metaphysical presuppositions about experience as a whole, and are thus more properly considered in the full context of that experience.

To illustrate more clearly the distinction I wish to make between philosophical problems which are present in history and philosophical problems presented by history (by our concept of history and the past), I shall give in the following pages five examples of problems that are quite often discussed by philosophers of history but which I choose not to discuss at length because I do not find them to be exactly historiographical problems.

Three important problems are connected with time. Problems of time obviously have some connection with history; but they do not of necessity have any special relationship with history. As a first example we may examine the familiar sceptical argument regarding the

real existence of the past. In Chapter V of his book Analytical philosophy of history[1] Danto gives a detailed discussion of certain temporal scepticisms, with an especial consideration of the argument that, for all we know, the world might have been created ex nihilo five minutes ago. Now, such an argument is not relevant to anything within history but is a problem of our whole experience. The philosophical puzzle can leave the historian quite unmoved, for as historian he quite legitimately takes the accepted structure of our experience for granted. The historian studies past events and not the past as such (the concept of "the past") in some strict philosophical sense. The historian is interested in those events which we already claim to be past events; but it should not be thought that he must therefore be interested in the concept of "pastness" or in establishing that past events are "really" past. To prove that purportedly historical events had no real existence, that the world really had been created an instant ago, would not simply leave the historian destitute of historical material, or destroy the discipline of history (and a few other studies as well), while at the same time the rest of our world and our interpretation of it remained comparatively unscathed. It would not be history alone that would be destroyed but our whole world and the conceptual scheme by which we understand it. The historian makes no conscious philosophical assertion about the nature of the past when he

1. (Cambridge, 1968).

talks of past events: that past events are past can be taken as given as easily in history as in everyday life. Our knowledge of the past and our belief about its real existence do not present us with a problem in the philosophy of history but with a general epistemological problem. And it is not a problem that occurs within the concept of history but one that only arises about the concept itself of history.

With reference to a second problem, it needs to be emphasized that not everything that is ordinarily significant with regard to the past is necessarily significant in history (as a discipline). Memory has an important relation with the past in everyday experience; but, although when the historical tradition was an oral one it was important for history, it now has little historical significance for the historian. Of course, the historian needs memory in his work just as anyone else does, perhaps to remember the references he looked up yesterday, the problems he dealt with when he wrote the previous chapter of his book, his plans for the future development of his narrative, and so forth. And it is true that memory occasionally does play a part directly in historical studies, in, for example, the direct testimony of eye-witnesses; and in some topics, such as the interpretation and verification of certain popular traditions, the nature and reliability of memory will play a very large part. But, in the historical field as a whole, the directly historiographical use of memory by the historian is very

limited. Meiland's concern, therefore, about the position of the sceptic regarding memory is strictly a philosophical concern and not one that belongs properly to history or to the philosophy of history. Memory is certainly not the historian's principal type of evidence about the past; nor indeed, as Meiland suggests, does the historian observe in any way cause and effect (for which memory is required). In his historiographical capacity the working historian may make no essential use of memory at all; he comes to know about the past in other ways. Historical knowledge of the past is by no means the same as personal knowledge of the past, a distinction which a concentration on the historian's use of memory comes to obscure.[2]

Although the concept of history is intimately bound up with time, the historian never comes to worry about the concept of time itself. Thus, in the pages that follow, I am not interested directly in purely philosophical problems about our concept of time.[3] It is true that discussions of such problems can be found in connection with history; but in whatever way such an issue as the distinction between McTaggart's A-series and B-series may be applicable to history, it is not itself historical in character and does not need to be argued about in the context of history. They are problems that have their being in our general picture of the world, and form a part

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2. For the historian and memory, see Scepticism and historical knowledge (New York, 1965), especially Chapter 7.

3. Cf. L. Susan Stebbing: "Some ambiguities in discussions concerning time", in Philosophy and history, ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton (Oxford, 1936).

of epistemology as a whole. Obviously any change in our concepts of time would affect those concepts as we make use of them in history; but such problems must be seen and discussed in their general, and primary, setting. Their function in history is in no way a peculiar one: it is entirely determined by the position of history in relation to our human knowledge, and our theory of knowledge, as a whole.

A fourth example of a problem discussed in the philosophy of history is the problem of the nature of covering-law explanation. Two objections are often made to the covering-law theory: that laws and principles should not be considered premises of an explanatory argument but rather as rules of inference, rules by which the explicandum is deduced from the explicans; and that laws are not part of an explanation but provide the justification of an explanation. A discussion of problems like these, which are very much problems within the covering-law theory of explanation, would obviously have to be considered worthwhile and even necessary for history if covering-law theory provided a complete account of historical explanation, although they would strictly still not be problems belonging to philosophy of history proper. It will be my contention that covering-law theory does not provide such a complete account, although there are many instances of a covering-law type of explanation in history. However, since I make no exclusive claims about any sort of explanation as valid for history, there can be no implied

obligation to attempt any clarification of the structure of a particular type of explanation with a full degree of internal comprehensiveness. Explanation in history, as I shall show, is to be judged on its own terms; and what I say later about the various structures of explanation is intended only to serve the rest of my argument. The bases of different sorts of explanation need not be thought peculiar to history; consequently, a detailed and exhaustive examination of them properly belongs to a discussion of the concept of explanation in its own right.

Lastly, although I shall mention it, I do not discuss as part of the development of my argument the contentious problem of individualism and holism in history. This is very much a central problem in the logic of historical discourse, but it is also one that has a much wider basis, and it does not have a significance for history different to that which it has for the social sciences, or, indeed, for the conceptual basis of our thought in general. Although it is of enormous significance and interest in itself, it is not a problem with a special interest which is in some important way exclusive to the philosophy of history. Indeed, even if the problem were resolved -- no matter how it might be so resolved -- the historian's researches and methods, his thinking and writing could continue unchecked and unchanged, to the same degree that ordinary language could do. Historians certainly have their own philosophical assumptions regarding "motive forces" in history and their individual or holistic nature.

Nevertheless, these assumptions are not necessarily manifested by the language of the historian, for holistic language is freely used by adherents of both sides of the logical argument. Thus, in whatever way logical problems might ultimately be resolved, the historian could continue to "speak with the common people".

To cover so lightly such philosophical problems in these few paragraphs above may give a very false impression of my own attitude to them. In other contexts, indeed, I have found these problems of immense interest and importance. My omission of any really substantial discussion of them in this dissertation is decidedly not intended to represent any kind of absolute judgment regarding their philosophical consequence, or their consequence for other kinds of discussion about history. All that I have wished to show is how I intend to concentrate here on the problems that I believe to matter <u>peculiarly</u> for the philosophy of history and especially for my own argument about individuality and objectivity in history. Most certainly I do not wish it to be thought that I have omitted a discussion of some problems frequently found in connection with the philosophy of history out of either ignorance or lack of interest.

II

A DEFINITION OF HISTORY

1. History-as-actuality and history-as-record

History is concerned with the past. Once this is said, however, we are immediately compelled, at the beginning of any discussion of history, to differentiate the two ways in which we use the word "history" in connection with the past.

"History" may refer to the past events themselves; or it may refer to the record, written or spoken, of those events. The distinction to be drawn is made clear by a consideration of the differing etymologies of the Germanic word and the Romance word for "history". In German the word "Geschichte" is derived from "geschehen", that is, "to take place", "to happen". The Romance languages (and English too) take their word from the Latin "historia", deriving ultimately from the Greek "ἱστορία", which meant originally "research", "exploration", "information"; the verb "ἱστορέω" had as its primary meaning "learn or know by inquiry", and in later Greek (although not in early, Classical Greek) it came to mean "give a written account of what one has learnt", "narrate in detail". The sources of the words "Geschichte" and "historia" show clearly the important distinction to be made between history as the past events themselves and history

as the study of past events. This distinction may seem too obvious to deserve mention; but even today it may be found that a supposed problem has its foundation in a confusion of written history and history-as-actuality, and occasional reference will be made to this confusion in the chapters that follow.

History-as-actuality, that is, history as the past events themselves, can only come to be known through what may loosely and generally be called records of the past -- through written materials or artefacts, through documentary or oral evidence, through archaeological discoveries, through surviving material of one sort or another. The past comes to be known through evidence of a direct sort, or through a special type of record that has made use of evidence -- the historical account. Because of this it could only be expected that in any language one word should come to do duty for what are seen to be two distinct concepts when they are examined in a philosophical way, but which, for the layman at least, are concepts that are inextricably bound together. In this thesis the two concepts of history will be understood to be quite separate, and when I use the word "history", I shall usually be referring to "written history": when my use of "history" refers to the actual past this special reference will be quite clear from the context.

In considering the objectivity of history in the light of the separateness of written history and history-as-actuality, one is presented immediately with a paradox.

Historical objectivity requires that written history should give us a truthful account of history-as-actuality, yet with the latter we can never be directly acquainted: as actuality we only know it, or we only have known it, as the present, and as the present, of course, it has not yet become history. In our efforts to establish objectivity, presented as we are only with various accounts based on the historical evidence, it would seem that we can only set about comparing one piece of history, and the techniques behind it, with another piece of history and with the primary evidence available in the present for our examination. This notion of the comparison of different narratives as the basis of an objective understanding of the past is inadequate, but it has been advanced as a solution to the problem of historical objectivity.[1] It is partly because of the difficulties inherent in connecting history-as-record with history-as-actuality that the idea that a historical statement is logically a special sort of statement about present facts can be so alluring: among other problems, the problem of objectivity can be much more easily dealt with.

The problem of objectivity has only to be given a passing mention here, in order to show its connections with the question what the nature of history is. I shall deal with objectivity more fully at later points. My immediate concern, now that the two main concepts of history

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1. Cf. Jack W. Meiland's concept of "triangulation" in his Scepticism and historical knowledge (New York, 1965). This is also discussed below, chap. IV, sect. 7.

have been satisfactorily differentiated, is to establish the exact functions of a written historical account. One of these functions, as I have already pointed out, is to provide an account of history-as-actuality; but, of course, this is not all. The historian does not attempt to copy the past but tries to convey it to the present meaningfully. Written history is the story of the past, and a story is more than a mere "mirror" of events. History is fact, explanation, and understanding: even a selective "copy" of history-as-actuality would be no more than a simple chronicle, or at best an account of past events as they were understood by their contemporaries. However, before we can look more fully at how history presents a meaningful story, it is necessary to make clear what history is a story of, that is to say, we need to define the subject-matter of history.

2. The subject of history

Written accounts may present the past in many ways, and may be about many different sorts of subject-matter. Written history is about past events, but it is an account that is much more than a straightforward reconstruction and also is about a well-defined type of subject. It is still necessary to make clear in a positive way what the subject-matter of history is, what methods the historian should use in his treatment of the past, and what purpose the historian should believe his account is ultimately to

serve. If we are to understand exactly how it is that history can be objective, we have to make a detailed definition of history, clarify the proper nature of the historian's approach to his subject-matter, elucidate what the historian's business really is, and mark off those parts of any historical narratives as they commonly occur, or of any accounts of historical research, that are extraneous to history as such.

A historical narrative tells us of past events; but it is immediately obvious that history is not concerned with all or any kinds of past events. True, there are various sorts of natural histories, biological histories, geological histories, and so forth. The occurrence of the word "history" and related words in such phrases is the result of perfectly valid linguistic usage. There is no linguistic or conceptual error to be identified when one talks of a "history of the earth" from its beginnings or even a "history of the universe". No detailed examination of this use of the word "history" is required for it to be understood that such a use is derived from the primary sense of "history". It is with the primary sense of the word that I am concerned here; and, indeed, the problems connected with the central meaning of "history" have always been found, as a source of discussion and argument, to be ample enough.

A preliminary definition of history must make clear that it is concerned with the development of mankind through the past. While this initial statement may seem

to be clear and simple, it is still not defined with an exactness adequate to form the basis, or part of the basis, of the definition of "history". History proper is not concerned with the development of mankind in "pre-historic" times; and this is not simply the result of the lack of historically acceptable materials. Indeed, with the development of modern scientifically-based research, we now have accounts -- "histories" -- of prehistoric periods, so that it could be said prehistoric times are no longer literally pre-historic: the term is now divorced from its etymology, as it seems, although it remains a valid and useful word in that it marks off a certain period in the development of mankind. In a strict sense, however, for the most part prehistoric times are still literally so. History deals with the progress of mankind since man first became socially organized. While there are many examples of a type of group-cohesion to be found in prehistory, the picture is still overwhelmingly one of either social disorganization or of forms of organization that are pre-social and pre-political. Prehistory is not history: history is the story of men living in society, and true society is characterized by a form of political consciousness. As Henri Pirenne is reported to have said: 'L'histoire est le récit des faits et gestes des hommes en tant que vivant en société.'[2] It is in this way that history proper is immediately distinguished from historical anthropology: the historian studies the acts of men in society.

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2. Quoted by G. J. Renier: History: its purpose and method (London, 1950), 35, from unpublished lecture-notes.

The subject-matter of history is clear, although the problem of the historian's method of approach to his subject has still not been resolved.[2a]

3. Selective definitions of historical facts

History deals with man in society. I have pointed out that it must not be thought of as dealing with something more than that. In this section I wish to argue for the counterpart of that position, that is to say, that history is nothing less than the story of man in society. If it is this story, it is the whole of it. In making this point, consideration of selectivity first enters into a discussion of history.

Two sorts of selectivity are relevant here: the first, that simple recorded facts are not historical unless they are interpreted, that is, unless they are the subject of historical judgment; the second, that simple recorded facts are not historical unless they are significant. The second sort may seem initially to be quite different from the first sort; but clearly it can be considered as a more specific variant of the first sort, namely that historical facts are only those facts that are judged to be significant.

Of the first sort of selectivity regarding the definition of history and historical facts, we may cite as one example Oakeshott's thinking on history. In Experience and its modes Oakeshott writes that 'because an event is

2a. See also Appendix A.

(in some sense) recorded, it does not imply that it is historical'; and that 'before a "recorded" event becomes a historical event, a judgment must have been interposed'.[3] A more wide-ranging and explicitly relativist viewpoint is shown by Carl Becker in his article "What are historical facts?" in which he maintains that the historian deals

> not with the event, but a statement which affirms the fact that the event occurred. When we really get down to the hard facts, what the historian is always dealing with is an affirmation -- an affirmation of the fact that something is true. ... For all practical purposes it is this affirmation about the event that constitutes for us the historical fact. If so the historical fact is not the past event, but a symbol which enables us to recreate it imaginatively.[4]

Becker's position obviates the difficulty supposedly created by the historian's lack of access to past events by defining historical facts not as about the events themselves but as about the testimonial records of those events. Again, the record of an event must be analysed as an interpretation of the event by someone. In speculative philosophy of history it is worthwhile considering as relevant such a contrast as Spengler makes between the world-as-nature and the world-as-history, where the latter

> reviews once again the forms and movements of the world in their depths and final significance, but this time according to an entirely different ordering which groups them not in an ensemble picture of everything known, but in a picture of life, and presents them not as things become, but as things becoming.[5]

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3. (Cambridge, 1933), 90, 91.

4. In The philosophy of history in our time, ed. Hans Meyerhoff (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), 124.

5. "The world-as-history" (reprinted from The decline of the West), in Theories of history, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York, 1959), 191.

In each case the statement of the fact that a past event occurred becomes "historical" as a result of the historian's activity as such. When I talk of "selectivity" being present here, therefore, I am not referring to a selectivity that takes place within a particular scheme, but rather to one that is created and determined by one scheme, in contrast to others, of interpretation and judgment.

Regarding the second sort of selectivity mentioned above, it is with a more pragmatic bent that E. H. Carr allows the term "historical" only to an élite body of facts about the past. Carr distinguishes between facts as such and facts of history: facts about the past are transformed into facts of history by being mentioned by historians, and it is this that gives them a historical significance. As an illustration Carr cites a rather obscure fact (that a vendor of gingerbread was kicked to death by a mob in 1850), first mentioned in a series of lectures at Oxford.

> Does this make it into a historical fact? Not, I think, yet. Its present status, I suggest, is that it has been proposed for membership of the select club of historical facts. It now awaits a seconder and sponsors.[6]

This notion of a historical fact is a possible one; yet, stated as simply as it is here, it seems rather bizarre. Its origin is to be found in a confusion of history, historiography, and individual historical narratives. If we are going to say that facts about the past become historical through their use by historians, our criteria for

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6. E. H. Carr: What is history? (Harmondsworth, 1964), 12.

this will be extrinsic rather than intrinsic; with regard to the historicity of the facts as it inheres in the facts themselves, which is what should be important here, we shall find ourselves placed in an untenable position. Carr's position determines the way in which it comes to predicate historicity of facts in a very arbitrary manner. If we follow Carr's thought we ultimately judge historical facts to be historical on what are logically non-historical grounds, since the significance of being mentioned by historians is not properly determined in all cases by any intrinsic historical qualities.

However, it is difficult to understand why the term "facts of history" should be given the meaning which Carr assigns to it. Facts about the past are facts of history if they have a bearing on man and his relations towards and within society, and likewise a fact of history is simply no more and no less than this type of fact about the past. It is immaterial to the status of the fact as such that it should be known to a historian and be used by him in his analysis of a problem. The upshot of Carr's position would seem to be that the historical quality of a fact is dependent on its significance, for it will often be felt that the use by a historian, or simply his citation, of a fact will indicate that that fact is of significance in the historical course of events. This is very frequently the case; but in no way should it be thought of as a logical connection. The citation of some famous event or the adoption of some patently obvious

explanation may turn out in the end to have been historically wrong, if its historicity depends on its genuine significance regarding the other facts of a historical account. It is also worth noting that the choice by a historian of a particular event for inclusion in his narrative may be made for illustrative purposes only, on grounds of convenience, and on grounds, therefore, which are historically arbitrary. The frequent mentioning of the same event by different historians will often be a result of convention: the example used is well-known and consequently is always cited in a particular connection because of its familiarity; it should never be taken that this necessarily means that other examples would be less satisfactory if they were used for the same purpose.

The claim that historicity depends on significance is not an uncommon one. Certainly, significance is very important in history, and some problems connected with significance and the historian's evaluation of events will have to be looked at in a later chapter. Nevertheless, I believe that it can be directly asserted that the definition of a fact as "historical" does not entail its definition as "significant"; nor need a fact be claimed as significant before it can be considered as historical. History is the whole of the story of the past of man in society. A "historical" fact is simply to be defined as a fact about man in society in the past.

4. The problem of a complete history

The maintenance of the position that only selected facts about the past are facts of history may in part be an attempt to avoid the consequences of a statement that the facts of history include all the facts about the past of social man. Nevertheless, it must be asserted that history is everything in the past of man.[7] For the historian everything in this past is worthy of consideration: 'dans l'histoire le détail c'est tout.'[8] Therefore it must be realized that historical facts are infinite in number, and so a numerically complete history of the world can never be achieved.

For some of those persons who think about history the idea that historical facts are infinite in number may be a source of anxiety; but, indeed, that historical facts are infinite is the case. The past can never be reconstructed in its entirety either in practice or in theory; but these limitations can scarcely be cause for alarm. It is true that

> because of such limitations no historical account can cover the past fully: it is a reasonable inference, therefore, that the events themselves are always richer and more varied and complicated than any account can possibly be.[9]

Nevertheless, the limitations necessarily imposed by the

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7. Cf. Boyd C. Shafer: "History, not art, not science, but history", Pacific Historical Review, 29 (1960).

8. M. Giry, in his preface to F. Lot: Les derniers carolingiens; quoted by J. B. Black: The art of history (London, 1926), 4.

9. G. J. Tapp: "Knowing the past", Journal of Philosophy, 55 (1958), 465.

finiteness of human thought are not exclusive to historical work; they are characteristic of our thoughts about all the different varieties of our experience. Indeed, from a pragmatic point of view, it is essential for history to be selective, in order that the results of the historian's work should be both comprehensible and worthwhile for his readers.

The necessity of ensuring that history somehow be "complete" is behind one kind of criticism of the notion that the facts of history are infinite. Behind a second kind of criticism of the same notion is the suggestion that the historian, if he is potentially concerned with everything about the past, in some way lacks discrimination, that history for some is, as Oakeshott has put it, 'a mere exhumation of past events'.[10] (Many historians might wish that their task was as easy as this phrase implies, that the course of past events could quite simply be exhumed.) However historical facts are defined, the historian has still to select his facts and order his work; to say that the historian is concerned with everything about the past of man is only to say that he must hold every fact to be _prima facie_ worthy of consideration.

Therefore, the basis of a definition of history and the first guiding principle of the historian in his work is that history is concerned with the whole of the past of mankind in society. All true historical accounts are concerned to relate with a certain fulness (according to the

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10. _Op. cit._, 93.

level of detail of the narrative) an account of a particular section of man's past.

Since history is the whole of the story of man's past, it must include not only an accumulation of the facts of the past but also a presentation of a synthesized account that will integrate the fields of man's activities as man himself is an integrated whole. Historians, that is to say, must write general history as well as specialized historical accounts; only general history ultimately presents a true and complete historical synthesis. However general history is such an important topic that I have devoted a whole chapter to it rather than give it a cursory treatment here.

The idea of a "complete" history is one that presents us with complexities not only through rather simplistic quantitative problems like those I have just mentioned, but also in regard to the qualitative problem of completeness and its relationship with the representativeness of a historical account. I have already said that it is not the historian's task to "copy" the past but to convey it to us meaningfully; therefore the "complete history" is not to be judged by the literal completeness with which it reconstructs or re-creates the past.

Since history is not a "copy" of past events, it is mistaken to assert that it is the sole or principal task of the historian to re-create the past. Re-creation of the past is only one of his tasks, and even so, it is not essential for historical completeness (as a fair and full

representation) in an account of past events that the historian should re-create entirely those past events. The historian has not only to be selective; he must also provide an understanding of the past that is not to be found in a reconstruction of the events themselves. And to do this he must frquently avoid reconstructing in a simple way that contemporaneous understanding of past events which may often be historically faulty, although it may occasionally be to the point, or serve his purpose, to do so.

To define the historian's task as reconstruction is too simple: to define it solely as reconstruction is frankly misleading and dangerous. Such a view of historical work ignores one of the substantive characteristics of history -- the historian's use of hindsight (and this is one characteristic which, despite its importance, is not often examined in its own right. Hindsight is central to the structure of written history. It is precisely the historian's hindsight which ensures that the account he gives of past events is both more and less than a reconstruction, or re-creation, or reliving of those events. It is less than a reconstruction, because the historian is obliged to omit, in their subjective aspect -- that is, as part of his own individual reconstruction -- the attitudes of contemporaries of past events to those events in which they participated; he is obliged to omit them in so far as the sort of understanding of events engendered by those attitudes is inadequate or erroneous for historical

purposes. The historical account is also more than a reconstruction, because the historian's understanding aspires to be superior to the understanding of the contemporaries of the events. Again, it is more than a reconstruction, because the historian understands and explains, not only in terms of the past and present of the events examined (as indeed contemporaries might well have done), but also in terms of the future of those events.

Thus it is that a complete narrative history is something much more sophisticated than a simple record or reconstruction of history-as-actuality. We can see that the problem of objectivity in the historian's relation to both his working material and his finished narrative is going to prove to be a more complex one than we might at first have imagined. The objectivity of a historical record of events has to be judged in the context of a complexity of fact and explanation, past and present, and the historian's dealings with his material. It will be seen that some of the justification of a historical "story" is to be found within that story itself, in terms of the historian's understanding of his subject.

5. History as a story

It has been said that history is the story of man in his social life. It must be shown now exactly what is intended by the use of the word "story". To talk of a historical narrative as a story is to claim that it must

be more than a mere recital of facts. It must be a developed and cohesive account: in sum, it will, frequently, be a "story", in the fullest literary sense of that word.[11]

A discussion of the nature of a cohesive historical account involves the well-known and much-discussed distinction between history and chronicle, between plain narrative and significant narrative. The idea that the historian must give more than what is in effect only a bare list of events has given rise to much recent argument both over whether it is the case that the historian should do this, and over what the precise difference is (if indeed a distinction can be made) between a plain narrative and a significant one.

It is interesting to note that the idea that the historian must do more than give a bare recital of events is a very old one, with its sources in antiquity. For example, it was basically in terms of history and chronicle that Lucian, in the second century, criticized the historians of the Parthian Wars; in his comments on these writers he says:

> Another of them has compiled a bare record of the events and set it down on paper, completely prosaic and ordinary, such as a soldier or artisan or pedlar following the army might have put together as a diary of daily events.[12]

Indeed, Lucian, nearly two thousand years ago, saw where the difference between history and chronicle, between

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11. In most western European languages the words for "history" and "story" are the same. Cf. German Geschichte, French histoire, Italian storia, Spanish historia; and one archaic sense of English story.

12. Lucian: "How to write history", in Works (London, 1913-67), VI, 25, 27.

plainness and significance, lay as clearly as any recent thinker. The difference is to be found in the competence of the historian, in the sophistication of his technique (and also, sometimes, in the adequacy of his working material), and not in the possibility of any so-called plain narrative of simple fact. However, nothing I may say in this section is calculated to exclude the possibility of fully competent compendia of historical facts, such as dictionaries of dates; I wish to show below that it is the case just that there cannot be a plain narrative of facts.

The common suggestion is that there can be two sorts of narratives of past events.[13] To put the matter very simply: plain narratives are those which list historical facts in the plainest way, with the intervention of a minimum of interpretation (ideally, of none at all) and of certainly no historical judgment. Significant narratives, on the other hand, take their evidence, including plain narratives and the facts contained in them, set the events they describe -- or whatever can be deduced from them -- in an explanatory context, and interpret these events using judgment and discrimination; and it is this latter, significant

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13. The putative distinction between history and chronicle is treated at length by Arthur C. Danto in his Analytical philosophy of history (Cambridge, 1968), 115-142; this passage involves criticism chiefly of Professor W. H. Walsh's views as they were put forward by him in An introduction to philosophy of history (London, 1951). I do not discuss the main problem here because I concur with Danto's argument, except in so far as he believes his conclusions about history and chronicle to compel an acceptance of relativism; he says that 'the imposition of a narrative organization logically involves us with an inexpungable [sic] subjective factor' and 'the relativists are accordingly right'(142).

narrative which the historian proper is supposed to provide us with.

In theory at least, then, plain narratives should tell us what happened, and significant narratives tell us what happened, how, and why. This simple theoretical distinction implies that at a fundamental logical level history, that is to say, actual historical accounts, can be divided into fact and explanation (including interpretation and evaluation). Plain narratives, however, are quite impossible, for lack of explanation alone does not make a narrative plain. Even before the task of explicit interpretation and explanation begins, the historian, as he seeks to construct his story from the relevant material at his disposal, is concerned to give his narrative significance: he must make use of a framework, decide the focal point of the story, see the structural importance and determine the values, with respect to the external form of his work, of what he is to tell his audience. Such evaluation will usually take place simultaneously with explanation: evaluation and explanation in the development of a historical narrative will usually form a single activity. The literary evaluation of the elements of a narrative can take place on its own, though. If evaluation of this kind is any part of a narrative, it must be part of the "plain" narrative, if this can be truly a narrative. There can be evaluation without explanation, but the following example illustrates what this sort of narrative might involve: a historian could tell the story of past events in a way that would puzzle

the reader as much as, perhaps, the evidence puzzled the historian, with no explanation offered. Clearly, an account of past events of this nature is not really what is meant when a "plain" narrative is talked of. At a more purely academic level, at the level of scholarly research, the researcher may often give an account of his findings about a particular historical event, or personage, or document, as plainly as he can. But the more this succeeds with its plainness, the less applicable to it will be the term "narrative". It will be a narrative according as it is an integrated account; and if it is an integrated account, its structure must involve evaluation. Plain narratives exclude interpretation and explanation in theory at least, but the ascription of the term "narrative" to any historical account presupposes an evaluation of its material. It is no objection that literary evaluation, as opposed to more obviously historical evaluation, should be discounted since it is somehow non-historical. In the logic of history the literary ability of the historian is as essential to the development of a historical narrative, and affects the historical content of that narrative, as more directly historical types of judgment and interpretation. In the end, therefore, whether we are talking of "plain" narratives or "significant" narratives, it has to be conceded that as the historian begins to write, plain facts quickly disappear. Any belief that plain narratives (bare historical reports) are actually possible must be abandoned.

6. A definition of narrative

In discussions about history the term "narrative" is most often used to refer to a substantial piece of written history about the progress through time of certain individuals, or events, or institutions, which are given by the historian a development roughly in accord with their actual chronology. It should be understood that I mean nothing as specific as this by my use of the term. Logically considered, the conventional term is arbitrarily applied; the long narrative about development through time is only one special instance of a general type of historical treatment. Through an examination of its size, subject-matter, and treatment I shall endeavour to make clear that kind of account to which the term "historical narrative" should be understood properly to apply.

With regard to its size a narrative is generally thought of as something of book-length, the length, perhaps, of an average novel. Nevertheless, there is no logical reason deriving from the nature or treatment of a historical subject for historical narratives to be of that length: their size and scope will be determined by the subject chosen. A limited subject and a consequent brevity will not change the nature of a historical account in the way that it changes the nature of a fictional account, so that the difference between a novel and a short story is more than one of size. Practically considered, a historical narrative may be of any length.

It is sometimes claimed, but more often implied by the manner in which the term "narrative" enters into discussion, that the subject-matter of a narrative involves a degree of temporal succession, of movement through time by its subjects; and the counterpart to this is that situational accounts of history -- those accounts which, for example, present a static picture of a society at a given point in time, which set the scene, or are devoted to structural analysis (and there are undeniably many examples of accounts like these in history) -- are not narratives in anything like the same way. A narrative, that is to say, relates the story of such-and-such a particular through time from T-1 to T-2.

Initially this appears to be an attractive position. However, I believe that there are several arguments to be brought against it. First, I would hold that this position is an example of the confusion of history-as-record with history-as-actuality. The historical account relates the past, but it does not copy the past, and, most importantly, it does not copy time: there is no temporal succession in the historical account that concerns development through time; there is only the report of it. We may be deceived by the fact that we have to start on page 1 and read through to, say, page 300; but the historian in his description can and frequently does move backwards and forwards in the time-scheme of his subject; and we too may leaf through the book as we choose. Being in the middle of a historical narrative does not resemble being

in the middle of the events narrated. Page 1 is not a memory for us as last year is necessarily a memory for us: the whole book is always and completely available to us, and so are all of its statements of fact, regardless of the original temporal succession of those facts in actuality. For this reason the historical narrative that relates a temporal succession could usefully be thought of as a four-dimensional picture. A picture of a period of development is the equivalent of a picture of a situation because for the historian as he writes his account the one is as complete and as determinate and as fixed as the other. For the purposes of his narrative he can manoeuvre at will through the time of his temporal narrative as he can through the space of his situational account.

The narrative of development can be conceived as presenting a picture significantly like that of the situational narrative: similarly the latter contains an important element thought to belong only to the narrative of temporal development. Development concerns change; and change as such is at the very root of history just as it is one of the characteristics of man as man. Now, the description of change is present in the developmental narrative in an explicit way; and I would wish to say that in the situational narrative it is present too, but is implicitly there. The historian's picture-narrative, the description, for example, of the state of a society at such-and-such a date, is not about a subject in vacuo, but about a subject that has developed to a certain stage and

will develop from that stage. The "static" story not only presupposes but to a notable degree is about the development and changes that gave rise to the situation described. The situational account does not have a subject that is timeless but one that is very much in time and involved with time. In many descriptive accounts the historian is committed to explaining how particular features of the situation developed; in those accounts in which he is not so involved, the fact of change and development is there for us as we read the story, and essentially there for us just because of its subject, man in society. Temporal development lies in any truly historical description: the hackneyed adage that every picture tells a story has an applicability to history that is less than trite. And when the historian describes the state of a fixed and rigid society such as Sparta, I do not believe that the point that I have made is refuted: true, there is no change to be described either implicitly or explicitly; but that the Spartans suffered no change in their society is a fact that is very much bound up with time, for a description of such a changeless society has behind it very strongly the idea of a perverted development through time that is no development at all -- the development of a society into an ever greater rigidity. The very concept of a static society presupposes developed ideas of time and historical change; and to emphasize that society's rigidity and lack of change is nothing less than to draw attention to the temporal dimension.

Finally, we must look at the nature of the treatment that goes to make a "narrative". By no means do all the written accounts that are found in historical journals present us with a narrative treatment of their subject: many pages are given over to what are generally called "notes and discussions" (besides, of course, reviews), and such a phrase adequately conveys an impression of their nature and purpose. These notes should be thought of, and I imagine most historians think of them in this way, as in some sense preliminary or preparatory to history proper, the writing of a cohesive historical account. Notes and document-reports are one stage in the development from source-material to the historical synthesis. However, it is true that most major examples of historical essays are examples of narrative. What is the treatment that makes a piece of history a narrative?

The lexical definition of "narrative" is "tale", "story", "recital of facts"; and a "story" is defined as an "account of incidents or events", "statement regarding the facts pertinent to a situation in question". In this last definition is to be found the cohesiveness that generally makes a historical account a true <u>story</u>. A historical narrative is such because the data of the historian go to form an account that is centred on some focal point, that is, on a situation, on a problem, on an idea, on the historian's own special thesis; and this account, in one way or another, makes continual reference to that focal point. Almost all historical accounts present the reader

with a cohesion and unity which are given to them by their relation to their subject as it is conceived and set down by the historian. It is this treatment that ensures that historical accounts are true examples of "stories" or "narratives".

The literary form of a narrative, whether situational or temporal, is such that differences in the fundamental nature of the subject-matter are subordinated to the contingent needs of writing an account. I mean here that the historian has in some way to unfold his narrative. In unfolding it he will not necessarily keep intact even the general time-scheme present in events, and will often show little regard for the retention of the temporal order of details. In arranging the elements of his story, the historian will hold the temporal factor to be only one among others, although, naturally, the very nature of historical development and our own understanding of time will result in the predominance of the original temporal order in any temporal narrative. The succession of facts in a narrative will be determined by the historian's conception of its structure. It will not therefore be an essentially temporal succession; and it will be a succession that is as necessary in the relating of facts contemporaneous with one another as in the relating of successive events. The historian cannot describe a static situation in one immediate whole, but is obliged to impose an order on its elements. From the point of view of the logic of a narrative, the structural conception and the

artistic expression will be in their essence the same for the arrangement of simultaneous events as for that of successive events. Narrative succession, therefore, is not to be confused with the temporal succession of the events narrated; and narrative succession is of the same logical order in the account of a historical situation as in the account of a historical development.

For my purposes it can be seen that a historical "narrative" is intended to be a broad concept, but certainly not one that I should believe to be capriciously defined. Logically, I would hold, our initial idea of a narrative, as a rather lengthy, almost conversational book with a fairly large-scale topic, is an arbitrary one: this notion of a large-scale narrative does not differ intrinsically from other historical narratives, nor does it present any philosophical problems that are uniquely its own. Henceforward the definition of "historical narrative" that I shall be using will be of an account of the past of any length, whether of a situation or some temporal process, that is given factual cohesion by a central subject or theme.

7. Particular and general in history

I have said that history is the story of man in his social life, or the story of man in society. What exactly does the use of the phrases "man in his social life" and "man in society" entail in relation to history?

The story of man in his social life cannot be said to be exclusively history. It is true that "history" includes no more than "man in his social life", but "man in his social life" is a subject that is covered by more disciplines than history alone. The past of social man is also the province of, for example, sociology and anthropology. The subject-matter of history would also seem to be encroached on in a significant way by many other disciplines. What is it that makes the treatment of the subject of man in the past by the discipline of history peculiarly historical? In what way precisely does history deal with its subject-matter?

The social life of mankind may be examined in two fundamentally distinct ways. It may be looked at from a point of view that is concerned with the individual or from a point of view that is concerned with the general. The difference between history and the many social sciences (into which group many historians and philosophers would wish to assimilate history) is to be found in the fact that history in its choice of subject-matter, in its methodology, and, in practice, in its results is (whatever the theory of the historian who is responsible) primarily and indisputably concerned with the individual and particular. Whatever the present state of the social sciences, they intend ultimately (and hopelessly, perhaps) to develop a body of general laws which in their perfection will have left behind the individual instances on which they were based. The social sciences seek to make statements which,

while applicable to individual instances, will in themselves be divorced from time and space, in so far as any statement of a general law will not itself of necessity contain a specific spatial or temporal reference.[14] The ultimate state of any social science, because of its divorce from particular relations to time and space, must be non-historical. If any statements of the social sciences appear now to be historical in content, from the standpoint of theory this historical quality must be regarded as an imperfection. I shall develop some aspects of the theme of the individual and the general, of history and the social sciences, in a later chapter. It need only be said that if history were considered to be a social science, its ultimate aim could only be its own annihilation. Its laws, in their generality, would have severed any connection with history-as-actuality, and in themselves they could not form a separate disciplinary body of general laws, for some laws would be laws of psychology, others laws of sociology, or of anthropology, or of economics, and so on; that is to say, there cannot logically be any general laws of history as such, although there may be laws which can only be applied to historical development (because they involve time), or which can only be derived from historical studies (because, for their formulation, they require an examination of the particular in time).

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14. I am aware that many social scientists do not believe that regarding general laws the social sciences have the same aims as the physical sciences. Even so, their arguments seem to be based on practical not theoretical grounds; and their studies require a certain degree of generality.

Even if for no other reason, history must concern itself with what is individual in order to survive as an independent discipline. History, as Elton has written,

> is concerned with all those human sayings, thoughts, deeds and sufferings which occurred in the past and have left present deposit; and it deals with them from the point of view of happening, change, and the particular.[15]

History is the story of man in his social life in its individual and particular aspect: it is the story of individual men, or groups, or institutions, and particular events, in separate societies.

This emphasis on a historical concern with the particular must not be misconstrued. It is in an attempt to prevent any such misunderstanding, as, chiefly, that history is only concerned with individuals in a very concrete sense, that in the closing sentence of the last paragraph I included with "individual men" "groups" and "institutions", and countries, societies and movements may also be included here. It can be argued that for the historian to be able to talk easily of, say, "Germany" in a narrative is evidence that considerable generalizing has taken place for this concept ever to have been formed; and of course this is the case. But this is proper historical generalization, and it is proper so long as its end result is still a particular concept existing in its own historical right, and not an abstract general concept derived from individual instances. This sort of generalizing, in order to talk of, for example, daily life in ancient Rome, or

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15. G. R. Elton: The practice of history (London, 1969), 24.

cultural values in the late Renascence, or relations between Balkan states before the First World War, is very much part of historical work; and logically, its subjects are still individual and particular. The general in the social sciences is not the same sort of concept at all as the particular collective entity that results from generalizing work in history. This must hold as an adequate statement for the present; the arguments on this point will be developed later.[16]

What exactly written history is should now have been satisfactorily and clearly defined, at least with regard to my own purposes in the chapters that follow. It is the story of man in his social life in its existence as individual and particular: as the story of man, history is concerned with solely the human aspect of the world. And in its interest in man in his social life, history is not bothered with everything there is to know about man: it is, for example, not concerned with human physiology as a topic in itself, nor is it concerned with pre-social man, for it deals with how men react with each other in their social life, and with how men develop socially and politically. History deals with the individual aspect, for history is about the past, and it is only in its individuality that the past ultimately remains the past. And, lastly, history is a story; that is to say, the historical narrative does not simply report or mirror history-as-actuality -- it also interprets and explains it. We must

16. The nature and importance of holistic particulars in history are given a full treatment in chap. VIII, sect. 2.

now look briefly at what the purpose of history may be, and then, with the definition and purpose of history clear, go on to examine the historian's position regarding his material and his work.

8. The purpose of history

The nature of history cannot be fully understood unless we know why it is that we study the past, for it is only when we know this that we shall be able to state more certainly with what aims the historian should undertake his work. It is fundamentally important to any consideration of history that there should be an examination and clarification of the historian's basic attitude to the purpose of his work. At the outset the conclusion must be that the historian's work in history is quite simply a study of the past for its own sake. But perhaps this strictly is incorrect: it may suggest that the study of history can be made out to be a gratuitous activity. The principle of doing something for its own sake is all too easily brought into disrepute: we should say, more subtly, that history should be studied as if it were being studied for its own sake, for the knowledge that results from a study of the past unarguably has its legitimate uses.

Since historical study endeavours to discover and relate the truth about the past, immediate preoccupations other than with the past, especially when they lay claim to be of prime importance, can only be a hindrance in the

establishment of historical truth. The historian must study the past in the first instance in its own right, with regard neither to the present nor to the future, and with no deference to extra-historical considerations. Others may study the past for their own reasons; or they may make use of the historian's finished work in the pursuit of their own ends. The historian himself may progress, in his discussion of the past, beyond doing what counts as purely historical work (although, as he does this, he will logically no longer be simply a historian, and his historical work will no longer be simply history). Work that is only partly historical is valid in itself, but in order not to prejudice some of its own claims, or any claims that may be made to truth and objectivity by the historical part, it should be carried out only when the "pure" historical work is complete.

Historical work is most efficiently carried out when the study of the past is pursued single-mindedly, that is, when the historian limits himself to discovering the truth about the past. G. R. Elton has said:

> Like all rational activities, the study of history, regarded as an autonomous enterprise, contributes to the improvement of man, and it does so by seeking the truth within the confines of its particular province, which happens to be the rational reconstruction of the past.[17]

It is not difficult to understand that there must be a study of the past in its own right and for its own sake, or else our knowledge of our world would be incomplete; and since historians aim at the goal of true knowledge of

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17. Op. cit., 68.

the past, clearly this is what the discipline of "history" should be considered to be.

The study of history is legitimate in itself: that is to say, the study of the past in its own right is an acceptable and worthwhile pursuit, and moreover, one that is an essential part of the whole corpus of knowledge. Any use of history for another purpose must be thought of by the historian as secondary to that use which finds that history has a value in itself. Previously to the passage just quoted above, Elton makes the following point:

> The task of history is to understand the past, and if the past is to be understood it must be given full respect in its own right. And unless it is properly understood, use of it in the present must be suspect and can be dangerous.[18]

The serious work of historical study 'involves, above all, the deliberate abandonment of the present'. The historian Pieter Geyl also states that history must exist in its own right when he discusses Toynbee's attitude to history; he writes:

> The historian should take an interest in his subject for its own sake, he should try to get into contact with things as they were, the men and their vicissitudes should mean something to him in themselves. I do not mean that the historian should not have a point of view, that he should be indifferent to the problems of his own time; nor that he, having a point of view, and caring about the present and the future, should try to tell about past events as if they bore no relation to either.[19]

Herbert Butterfield provides a third example of a historian with similar ideas in this regard. In the following passage he makes the same point as Geyl and Elton above.

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18. Ibid., 66.

19. Debates with historians (London, 1962), 201.

> [T]he true historical fervour is the love of the past for the sake of the past. It is the fervour that was awakened in Gibbon and Gregorovius by the sight of the ruins of ancient Rome. And behind it is the very passion to understand men in their diversity, the desire to study a bygone age in the things in which it differs from the present.[20]

It may be that this last quotation takes us too close to the position that the only safe grounding for the study of history is that it be studied solely for its own sake. This would be an unnecessarily rigid attitude to adopt. Obviously if we wish to work towards true objectivity in historical studies, we must see history as an end, or possible end, in itself and not simply as a means to some other end. To approach the past simply for material that may be used to bolster up some argument in a topic quite unrelated to history as such is an important source of many of the abuses commonly associated with history. But equally, talk of a love of the past for the sake of the past, while it may be eagerly agreed with by not a few historians and philosophers, can easily lead a large number of people to question the value of history and to suggest that the study of the past must surely in the end be nothing more than a vain and sterile activity. We must avoid any implicit suggestion that approaching history as an end in itself precludes a realization of its value and utility both in other academic disciplines and even in many areas of practical life. For history to be a valuable study it is necessary that in the historian the conception of history as an end in itself somehow co-exists with the

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20. The Whig interpretation of history (Harmondsworth, 1973), 72.

conception of history as a possible means to other ends, as an activity of which the results may have many kinds of theoretical and practical uses.

It can generally be said that for the results of work in one area of knowledge to be useful to those involved in another area, those results must have been seen, by the person who arrived at them, as valuable in themselves, or, to put it somewhat more abstractly, that truth as such has its own worth. To see a study as an end in itself is to be able to work towards concrete achievement in a particular area unhampered by any considerations extraneous to the matter in hand and limited only by the internal logic of the study itself. Only solid results achieved in this way will be genuinely useful to others. Only a historian's single-minded establishment of historical facts will ensure his work a permanent value as a source of knowledge. Nevertheless, to say that the historian must work single-mindedly towards the establishment of any facts about the past is not quite the same thing as to say that the historian must study the past for its own sake. It is because history, rightly, has its practical uses that I believe it correct to say, not that history should be studied for its own sake, but that the historian must approach and work on his subject <u>as if</u> he were studying it for its own sake.

III

THE HISTORIAN, HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST, AND HISTORICAL MATERIAL

1. Introduction

A clarification of the nature of the historian's knowledge of the past is necessary before there can be a discussion of some of the problems of historical relativism and objectivity. With a better grasp of the concept of historical knowledge and a clearer idea of the material evidence of the past which is the means whereby the historian acquires that knowledge, some of the problems that I intend to consider later will be more easily dealt with. In directing our attention away from a definition of history and towards the historian we shall have as our main concern, in the context of the problems of objectivity, the determination of the proper relationship between the historian and his work. We must attempt to answer such questions as the following: What do we mean exactly when we say that the historian knows the facts of the past? What is the status of the statements of fact contained in written history? And how does the historian come to know the past in practice? Before any conclusions can be made about the problems raised by these questions, there must be a full consideration of several different aspects of written history. The relationship between the historian

and his writing of history is something that raises both theoretical philosophical problems connected with history, problems which arise from epistemological difficulties about the historian's knowledge of the past, and practical problems regarding the historian's methods of dealing with his material. The theoretical and the practical cannot be easily separated; and it is clear that the nature of our knowledge of past facts and the way in which we can come to have knowledge of those past facts are matters that are very closely connected.

The true definition of history, a proper conception of its purpose, and a drawing of an outline of the historian's methods in his work form a web of interwoven problems. Through an examination of these areas in their own right it would be realized that a very large number of topics need to be given a thorough consideration; here I shall largely have to confine myself to a discussion of those problems of historical knowledge and method which have a clear bearing on the subject I have chosen, that is, the character of written history which shows a treatment of its subject-matter that is at once both objective and individual.

Once it is agreed that history may be defined as the story of man in his social life, and that the immediate working principle of the historian in his studies can be said to be to treat the truth about the past as something that is worth discovering for its own sake, we must ask how it is that the historian executes his task. In other words, we must answer several questions: What is it exactly

that the historian studies? What is the material that the historian makes use of in his work? And how does he make use of this historical material that is the object of his study, first, to establish historical facts and describe historical events, and, second, to explain these events individually and give an integrated understanding to that part of history which he has selected for treatment?

Problems that are more or less wholly concerned with explanation will be left for discussion in a later chapter, for I intend to consider in detail several aspects of explanation and understanding in history. In this chapter I shall limit myself to an examination of what takes place when a historian uses historical material and comes to conclusions about certain historical facts. To this end it is necessary to make clear first what is to be understood when we talk of a historian knowing certain things about the past; thus it will be best to look now at some philosophical aspects of the problem of the historian's knowledge of the past and the meaning of historical statements.

Several quite distinct philosophical theories have been put forward as solutions to the problems presented by an analysis of the historian's knowledge of the past and the logical nature of written history. To a considerable degree these theories of historical knowledge may be tied to more general epistemological theories: in this context, therefore, only the specific historical relevance of any theories of knowledge will be considered. Some theories are especially significant with respect to the problem of

objectivity and the individual historian since they may be seen as providing a ready foundation for a point of view that stresses the necessity in written history of the historian's individuality. Unfortunately, they will be found unacceptable if history is defined as I think it should and must be.

It may be pointed out that theories like Oakeshott's and Collingwood's, the two which are discussed in the following pages, solve successfully problems of scepticism and objectivity. However, Oakeshott overcomes some sceptical objections to the claims of historical knowledge only at the cost of an extensive redefinition of the nature of historical knowledge and an unacceptable interpretation of what historical statements mean. And Collingwood solves any problems of objectivity only by altogether dispensing with any distinction between the subjective and the objective in historical knowledge: by re-thinking the thoughts of a historical character the historian makes those thoughts his own, with the result that subjective and objective are fused. Since Collingwood's theory would seem to provide one effective solution to the basic problem with which I am concerned -- the reconciliation of historical objectivity and the individuality of the historian -- it needs to be criticized at some length and shown finally to be unacceptable. Once Collingwood's ideas have been looked at, a more straightforward conception of historical knowledge, and the historian's acquisition of it, can be put forward.

2. Oakeshott's theory of historical knowledge

The first philosophical theory of historical knowledge to be considered is an early theory of Oakeshott's. It appears as probably the strangest of any theories about the nature of historical knowledge, at least from the standpoint of common-sense notions of history. This theory denies that there is knowledge of the past, if, that is, a phrase like "knowledge of the past" is understood as simply as the historian seems usually to think of it. It should be mentioned that in his more recent writings Oakeshott talks about historical topics in terms that do not entail the extreme position that he adopts in Experience and Its Modes, but the views about the nature of historical experience put forward in this book are ones that could still be thought tenable.

Oakeshott first argues that 'history is concerned only with that which appears in or is constructed from record of some kind'.[1] Such a statement is deceptively acceptable in its candour, for beyond this basic premise the theory quickly diverges from any common-sense views about history: as a result of idealist influences, Oakeshott maintains that knowledge relates to ideas and to experiences, which, in the case of historical knowledge, means the ideas and experiences of the historian.

> The distinction between history as it happened (the course of events) and history as it is thought, the distinction between history itself and merely experienced

1. Experience and Its Modes (Cambridge, 1933), 90.

> history, must go; it is not merely false, it is meaningless. The historian's business is not to discover, to recapture, or even to interpret; it is to create and to construct. ... There is no history independent of experience; the course of events, as such, is not history because it is nothing at all. History is experience, the historian's world of experience; it is a world of ideas, the historian's world of ideas.[2]

So it is that Oakeshott continually emphasizes that history is a matter of present experience, and does not deal with any past events as such that must be independent of present experience. Oakeshott's statements to this effect are not to be understood simply as making some sort of logical point about the historian's derivation of his "facts" from the material that constitutes his historical evidence. The theory is not to be understood in anything less than its full, extreme meaning: history is experience

> and not a course of events independent of experience. There is, indeed, no course of events independent of experience. History is not the correspondence of an idea with an event, for there is no event which is not an idea. History is the historian's experience. It is "made" by nobody save the historian; to write history is the only way of making it. It is a world, and a world of ideas.[3]

By saying that history is a world of ideas, Oakeshott means to say that history is not really a <u>part</u> of knowledge, that is to say, it is not to be defined as that part of our knowledge which deals with the past. History is rather a <u>way</u> of knowing; and it is a way of knowing not simply a part of reality but the whole of reality. It may be known from a limited standpoint, but it is still, despite any limitation of this nature, 'never a separable and independent

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2. <u>Ibid.</u>, 93.

3. <u>Ibid.</u>, 99.

part of reality'.[4] Historical knowledge is a form of present knowledge, of experience in and of the present. Historical experience is not a knowledge of a 'fixed and finished past, a past independent of present experience, which is to be considered for its own sake', but an experience that is really present. 'If the historical past be knowable, it must belong to the present world of experience.' Oakeshott develops this point further to say that 'the past in history varies with the present, rests upon the present, is the present'.[5]

It must be fully understood that Oakeshott is not offering us nothing more than a mere redefinition of words. He is not saying that the real past is the present evidence seen in and through its interpretation. Oakeshott still wishes to distinguish between the past as known by the historian and the actual past as such. In laying down the proposition that for the historian the phrase 'what really happened' must be replaced by 'what the evidence obliges us to believe', he concedes that the first phrase does have a reference: that there was a past that really existed, even if what was real is somehow beyond the evidence and therefore actually unknowable. Oakeshott does not deny that there is (or rather was) a past as such which the historian can never reach. Nevertheless, despite the impossibility of coming to know the real past, the historian does know, or try to know, something; and it is this --

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5. Ibid., 107.

6. Ibid., 108.

the real subject of history -- that is the knowable historical past. The nature of the historical past entails that the object of the historian's knowledge is 'the product of judgment and consequently belongs to the historian's present world of experience'.[6]

Oakeshott admits that we are presented here with a paradox, that

> the historical past is not past at all. And it is a paradox which must be taken absolutely. It is not merely that the past must survive into the present in order to become the historical past; the past must be the present before it is historical.[7]

In short, it may be said that Oakeshott has formulated a theory of history for which historical knowledge consists in a special present experience of historical evidence. The historical past is a particular organization of the present world of experience. 'The historical past is always present; and yet historical experience is always in the form of the past.'[8]

If we wish to follow Oakeshott in his development of a theory of history, then we must allow that history tells us nothing about the past as such and, more importantly, properly does not intend to discover anything about the "real" past. Although Oakeshott states that history is what the evidence obliges us to believe, he points out that this is not merely a sceptical point. And indeed, if we take the theory to an extreme, as Oakeshott himself

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6. Ibid., 108.

7. Ibid., 109.

8. Ibid., 111.

encourages us to do, the evidence can only oblige us to formulate and believe propositions about the present. Yet if history is understood to do no more than give to us a different organization of our present experience, then it must surely be considered redundant. Historians themselves certainly do not believe that their historical statements are in any way about a present world of experience; and it is hard to conceive what they would believe their function to be if they did, and whether they could seriously continue with historical work. Historians believe that they are genuinely trying to find out about the past as it really was.

Oakeshott has attempted to place the historian in a relation with his material by denying the possibility of actual knowledge of the past and asserting that the historian, with history, is in relationship with present facts through his present world of experience. In his general scheme of knowledge Oakeshott's interpretation of historical experience is a viable one, yet, although it is unknowable, the "past" as such still has a reference. So long as it is the case that the "past" really does have some meaning, it seems that we should attempt to describe how the historian sets about gaining knowledge of that past and relating the past to the present, even if it turns out that the past, at least practically, really is unknowable, and that, in consequence, the doubts of the sceptical realist about historical truth must be seen as warranted.

It is by means of a theory like Oakeshott's that we can, if we wish, solve the problem of the relationship of the historian to his subject-matter by a redefinition of the very subject of history. However, this sort of redefinition of "history" in no way refutes scepticism: it merely suppresses any sceptical doubts about the truth of the historian's conclusions from his evidence, in so far as those conclusions may be taken to refer to real past facts, by denying that historical knowledge is about the past at all. Certainly, if the basis of our concept of historical truth were what the evidence obliged us to believe, then doubtless historical objectivity would in many cases be easily established and maintained.

I cannot discuss here the fundamental philosophical position of such a view of history, with all its idealist tendencies. What I do hope to show is that, when a realist position is adopted, the past can be allowed to be knowable by the individual historian, scepticism is unnecessary, and historical objectivity can be attained.

3. Collingwood's theory of historical re-enactment

A second theory, which also will have to be rejected in the end as a basis for an account of historical knowledge, centres on the idea of "re-enactment". The importance of the historian as an individual has often been stressed in theories involving a description of historical knowledge, particularly in the context of a view of the

historian's work as a re-creation or re-enactment of past thought. The individuality of the historian as such is an essential part of this view of historical work, and yet, if this view were indeed correct, an inevitable conclusion would be that for the historian to be successful in his re-creation of thought, he would have to suppress his own personality entirely. In other ways, however, a conception of historical work as the re-enactment of the past and, in essence, nothing other than re-enactment is a faulty one. The theory of historical re-enactment and the arguments against it generally are well known.[9] All that is necessary here is a short general survey of the whole subject, together with a more detailed account of any points that I believe to be significant for my own argument.

In The Idea of History Collingwood writes:

> The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. ... The historian is never concerned with either of these to the exclusion of the other. He is investigating not mere events (where by a mere event I mean one which has

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9. For comprehensive treatment of Collingwood's position see especially: Alan Donagan: The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood (Oxford, 1962); William Dray: Laws and explanation in history (Oxford, 1957); Patrick Gardiner: The nature of historical explanation (Oxford, 1952); and Jack W. Meiland: Scepticism and historical knowledge (New York, 1965); and, in addition, the following articles: Arthur N. Child: "History as imitation", Philosophical Quarterly, 2 (1952); Errol E. Harris: "Collingwood's theory of history", Philosophical Quarterly, 7 (1957); Nathan Rotenstreich: "From facts to thoughts: Collingwood's views on the nature of history", Philosophy, 35 (1960); W. H. Walsh: "R. G. Collingwood's philosophy of history", Philosophy, 22 (1947).

> only an outside and no inside) but actions, and an action is the unity of the outside and inside of an event. ... His work may begin by discovering the outside of an event, but it can never end there; he must always remember that the event was an action, and that his main task is to think himself into this action, to discern the thought of its agent.[10]

Although Collingwood concedes that the historian is concerned with both the "outside" and the "inside" of an event, it quickly becomes clear which of these two aspects is the more important. Collingwood's true intent and the direction of his thought are clear, for he states shortly after the passage above that the processes of history

> are not processes of mere events but processes of actions, which have an inner side, consisting of processes of thought; and what the historian is looking for is these processes of thought. All history is the history of thought.[11]

The consequence of this way of thinking about the interests of the historian is that history must be about only some human actions; and certainly, if this restricted view of history were correct, history would be severely debilitated as the discipline concerned with man's social past: it would mean, for example, that reports of thoughtless or unthinking actions, which occur frequently with important consequences in written history as we know it, would in the strictest sense be non-historical. In fact there is no need for this point to be laboured, for Collingwood openly declares the restrictedness of history (and, incidentally, quite unfoundedly assumes the widespread support of historians themselves for a restricted view of actions

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10. The Idea of History (Oxford, 1946), 213.

11. Ibid., 215

that may be described as truly "historical"). He writes:

> It does not follow that all human actions are subject-matter for history; and indeed historians are agreed that they are not. But when they are asked how the distinction is to be made between historical and non-historical human actions, they are somewhat at a loss how to reply. From our present point of view we can offer an answer: so far as man's conduct is determined by what may be called his animal nature, his impulses and appetites, it is non-historical; the process of those activities is a natural process. Thus, the historian is not interested in the fact that men eat and sleep and make love and thus satisfy their natural appetites; but he is interested in the social customs which they create by their thought as a framework within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality.[12]

From this point Collingwood's thinking becomes increasingly unacceptable as an effort to elucidate the character of history as it is actually written. At first Collingwood was occupied with describing how the historian regarded his material: that is to say, he pointed out that the historian is concerned with both the outside and the inside of events. Although in the passage above he brushes the position that history has important connections with sociology and anthropology (in his reference to the historian's interest in the framework of social customs), he moves on to a more deeply philosophical theory of history, and in the words he uses he suggests implicitly that "historical" is almost a metaphysical term admitting only a very clearly defined type of human thought. If at the outset Collingwood seemed to be genuinely concerned equally with the outside and with the inside of human actions, actions, that is, <u>real</u> actions in the world, are soon forgotten, as they

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12. <u>Ibid.</u>, 216.

must be in a theory that concentrates on the re-creation of thought. A confinement of historical interest to actions that are bound up with thought, and then only with reflective thought, inevitably leads to a position where it is reflective thought itself that matters above everything else. Thus Collingwood's conception of the historical narrows still further, and a large part of written history with which everyone is familiar is no longer even alluded to:

> Historical knowledge, then, has for its proper object thought: not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself. This principle has served us to distinguish history from natural science on the one hand, as the study of a given or objective world distinct from the act of thinking it, and on the other from psychology as the study of immediate experience, sensation and feeling, which, though the activity of a mind, is not the activity of thinking.[13]

Collingwood goes on to elucidate that type of thought which is properly the subject-matter of history:

> In order, therefore, that any particular act of thought should become subject-matter for history, it must be an act not only of thought but of reflective thought, that is, one which is performed in the consciousness that it is being performed, and is constituted what it is by that consciousness.[14]

Collingwood's development of his conception of history has carried us a long way from many of the common and central references of the term "history". It can be seen to what extent the discussion has shifted from talk about history as that is commonly understood when Collingwood is able to make a statement like the following, where a

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13. Ibid., 305.

14. Ibid., 308.

categorical restriction of the subject of historical study is explicitly made:

> Reflective acts may be roughly described as the acts which we do on purpose, and these are the only acts which can become the subject-matter of history.[15]

If it is held that the subject-matter of history can only be reflective thought, then the initial conclusion could be that history proper is to be defined as political history, in which the emphasis is on the consciously expressed thoughts and rational actions of individuals. If Collingwood's line of thinking is pursued, however, the outcome is inevitably that history is to be defined as the history of ideas. In the end, indeed, this seems to be what Collingwood is saying -- that history is the history of ideas:

> The scientist, the historian, and the philosopher are thus, no less than the practical man, proceeding in their activities according to plans, thinking on purpose, and thus arriving at results that can be judged according to criteria that can be derived from the plans themselves. Consequently there can be histories of these things. All that is necessary is that there should be evidence of how such thinking has been done and that the historian should be able to interpret it, that is, should be able to re-enact in his own mind the thought he is studying, envisaging the problem from which it started and reconstructing the steps by which its solution was attempted. In practice, the common difficulty for the historian is to identify the problem. ... It is the historian's endeavour to discover this problem that gives importance to the study of "influences", which is so futile when influences are conceived as the decanting of ready-made thoughts out of one mind into another. An intelligent inquiry into the influence of Socrates on Plato, or Descartes on Newton, seeks to discover not the points of agreement, but the way in which the conclusions reached by one thinker give rise to the problems for the next.[16]

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15. Ibid., 309.

16. Ibid., 312-13.

Once his argument has been properly developed, Collingwood's theory can be seen to be narrowly prescriptive with regard both to the subject-matter of history and to the way in which the historian approaches and deals with his subject-matter. Since its conclusions are so directly contrary to the actual present nature of a historical account and its content, Collingwood's theory must be rejected completely as a generally complete description of history. In any case, history of ideas, as a discipline in its own right, adequately carries out the task that Collingwood would wish to assign to history proper.

However, anyone who holds strictly to a theory of re-enactment of thought as providing a full description of what the historian does must concur with Collingwood's conclusions. If the historian is to re-enact history, it is evident that he can only re-enact thought; and if he is going to re-enact thought, then it can only be conscious thought that will provide a subject for his re-enactment -- the unconscious workings of the mind cannot be re-enacted, for, in the historian's re-creation of them, they would become conscious thought, and, as such, would be quite different from their "original". Only conscious reflective thought would be a subject for history, because only 'a reflective activity is one in which we know what it <u>is</u> that we are trying to do', which, if the historian is re-enacting thought, he must know too.

When a theory of re-enactment is held as the sole theory which can give an account of historical procedure

the result, absurdly, will be that such passages as the following, which unquestionably are passages of history, must be discounted as examples of history. It is in such a consideration of some possible practical consequences of a theory like Collingwood's that one is able to realize some of the wide variety of written history. The first passage is a typical example of how a historian describes the effect of natural events on the course of history; such descriptions are undoubtedly a legitimate and necessary part of history.

> The most terrible plague which the world ever witnessed advanced at this juncture from the East, and after devastating Europe from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Baltic, swooped at the close of 1348 upon Britain. The traditions of its destructiveness, and the panic-struck words of the statutes which followed it, have been more than justified by modern research. Of the three or four millions who then formed the population of England more than one-half were swept away in its repeated visitations. Its ravages were fiercest in the greater towns, where filthy and undrained streets afforded a constant haunt to leprosy and fever.17

This is clearly history; but there is no evidence here of any thought to be re-enacted. Of course, the historian in his researches might have experienced anew a little of the fear which the inhabitants of England would undoubtedly have felt (unreflectively) at the time of the Black Death; but this cannot be what Collingwood means in his talk of re-enactment.

The second passage is again clearly a typical piece of history. It is about an institution, histories of which cannot be accounted for by theories like Collingwood's,

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17. J. R. Green: A short history of the English people (London, 1915), I, 233.

unless we are to indulge in elaborate techniques of reduction; at the least, such techniques would seem to be unprofitable, and in any case they do not describe how the historian actually thinks about historical particulars like institutions.

> The Senate, on the other hand, never utterly disappeared, though its heyday in Constantinople was in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries. The Senate of Constantinople was never like the old Roman Senate. Even when in 359 it was given the privileges that the Roman Senate enjoyed -- thus becoming an official elector -- it remained different in composition and devoid of the other's tradition. Its very name was less venerable; in the Greek language it was translated not gerousia but sugklêtos, the assembly. The Senate of Constantinople consisted of all present and past holders of offices and rank above a certain level and their descendants. It was thus a vast amorphous body comprising everyone of prominence, of wealth and of a responsible position in the Empire.[18]

The third passage contains an example of the sort of thought that Collingwood's theory should refuse to admit as "historical" thought. Yet such thought is often of the greatest interest historically, for it may result in actions which have important and lasting effects or which, for the historian's own purposes, provide a significant typification of character. Actions are frequently motivated by unreflective fear or anger; but even more problematical for a theory of re-enactment are those actions that are obviously associated with the fully reflective thought of an insane or irrational person. Can such insane thought really be a suitable subject for a historian's re-enactment? And are we even to expect that the historian should re-enact it? In the following passage, for example,

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18. Steven Runciman: Byzantine civilization (London, 1961), 72.

Suetonius is writing of Caligula; and a demand that the "inside" of Caligula's actions be re-enacted and understood would seem quite out of place for the purposes of history.

> The day before the Circensian games, he used to send his soldiers to enjoin silence in the neighbourhood, that the repose of his horse Incitatus might not be disturbed. For this favourite animal, besides a marble stable, an ivory manger, purple housings, and a jewelled frontlet, he appointed a house, with a retinue of slaves, and fine furniture, for the reception of such as were invited in the horse's name to sup with him. It is even said that he intended to make him consul.[19]

Three incidental points could be made here with regard to this passage: first, as an example of biography it is still an example of history -- the historian writes about particulars in the past, and there is no sound reason of logic or of method for the historian to make a distinction between particular individuals and particular events or particular institutions; second, for many philosophical points, whatever the historiographical quality of an illustration may be, it can still be a passage that demonstrates satisfactorily certain features of history -- good history and bad history, true history and false history, the historical and the non-historical are not parallel terms; third, while Suetonius, despite his many faults as a historian, is frequently used as a source of ancient history by modern historians, his writings are not an example of a source-work (in the logical sense) -- Suetonius is logically the writer

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19. Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, translated by Alexander Thomson, revised by T. Forester (London, 1926), 288-89 (IV, 55).

of a secondary work, for we have only to remember that he was born over thirty years after the death of Caligula, and his history was written almost certainly at some time after the year 121.

The fourth and fifth passages to be cited here exemplify events that bear witness to serious reflective thought on the part of the individuals involved; that is to say, the historian could straightforwardly think himself into the historical position if he chose to do so. Yet both examples show, I believe, precisely how history goes -- and must go -- beyond re-enactment. In the first case the historian could busy himself with an extensive re-creation of the thinking of the protagonists; but what would be the point of concentrating on a re-enactment of thought that failed catastrophically to deal with the problems involved? Clearly it is important to grasp what it was that certain individuals intended in their solution, as they believed, of an important problem; but Collingwood's theory appears to be oriented only towards that thinking which may be described as successful, or at least partially successful, in the actual situation of the problem. Some re-enactment theorists would say that the historian sees what went wrong and the right solution too; but to say that the historian should describe a successful solution to the problem as well as the unsuccessful approaches actually made is in many cases an unnecessary proposal. It is enough for him to say why the actions that did take place failed to have the effect intended.

> The object of the Schlieffen Plan, which the German High Command put into operation as soon as war began, was the rapid and total defeat of France by the seizure of Paris and the northern industrial provinces. ...
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> The explanation for this failure of Germany's first war aim, the collapse of France, was complex. The younger von Moltke, German chief of staff, possibly foredoomed it to failure when he decided to weaken the hammer head in order to strengthen the hinge. He was anxious to prevent a French invasion of Lorraine. The initial resistance of the Belgian army probably delayed the German timetable by two or three days, which had some importance. ...
>
> There was a technical reason, too, for this early conversion of what had been expected to be a war of rapid movement into one of immobility. Warfare had entered upon a phase when defence had caught up with offence. The machine gun and heavy artillery came into use, while motor transport and aviation was [sic] still in their infancy and the tank had not yet been invented.[20]

In the second case, contemporary thought would be interesting and historically important in other contexts of written history; but in the passage cited below a re-creation of thought would only be misleading. It is with this type of historical understanding that historical hindsight is seen to be of great significance, for what the historian thinks about certain events always claims a wider and deeper meaning and reference than the ideas of the contemporaries of the events in question. The passage below relates the arrangements under which the Germanic invaders finally settled permanently in the lands of the failing Roman Empire of the west.

> [T]he principle of these arrangements was directly derived from the old Roman system of quartering soldiers on the owners of land. On that system, which dated from the days of the Republic, and was known as hospitalitas, the owner was bound to give one-third of the produce of his property to the guests whom he reluctantly harboured. This principle was now applied

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20. David Thomson: Europe since Napoleon (Harmondsworth, 1966), 554-55.

> to the land itself, and the same term was used; the proprietor and the barbarian with whom he was compelled to share his estate were designated as host and guest (hospites).
>
> This fact illustrates the gradual nature of the process by which western Europe passed from the power of the Roman into that of the Teuton. Transactions which virtually meant the surrender of provinces to invaders, were, in their immediate aspect, merely the application of an old Roman principle, adapted indeed to changed conditions. Thus the process of the dismemberment of the Empire was eased; the transition to an entirely new order of things was masked; a system of federate states within the Empire prepared the way for the system of independent states which was to replace the Empire. The change was not accomplished without much violence and continuous warfare, but it was not cataclysmic.[21]

In the five examples of historical passages that I have given above re-enactment by the historian of the thought underlying action can be seen to be impossible, or absurd, or historically unsatisfactory (because the "original" thought is, for the purposes of historical understanding, either wrong or misleading). The examples are not by their nature in any way exceptional or rare; they are very typical of passages that frequently occur in the work of historians whatever their explicit theories of history may be. From a consideration of passages like those cited above it is to be concluded that re-enactment must be rejected as the whole basis of the historian's procedure. Certainly re-enactment can be a useful aid to the historian in his work, providing him with insights and suggesting to him, where they are appropriate, rational explanations of action. Like its wider and less demanding counterpart, empathy, it frequently provides the historian

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21. J. B. Bury: History of the Later Roman Empire (New York, 1958), I, 206.

with a "way in" to the particular problem he is studying. Nevertheless, even where re-enactment is clearly relevant, it must always be remembered that it is in no way a procedure that is self-justifying in that it seems to offer a satisfactory description and explanation of some action. Here is found the weakest point of any theory which gives the re-enactment of thought a central position in the historian's work: any relation of empathy with a historical subject suggests hypotheses to the historian, but conclusions must still be substantiated and confirmed through the material evidence available to him. I shall be returning to this point when I discuss the historian's understanding of the past.

The theory of re-enactment brings to the fore one very important feature of the historian's subject-matter: this is that a very large part of history <u>does</u> directly concern both reflective thought and -- more widely -- thought and feeling in general. What Collingwood calls the inside of actions is not to be forgotten by the historian: he must always remember the essential difference that there is

> between a paper flying before the wind and a man flying from a pursuing crowd. The paper knows no fear and the wind no hate, but without fear and hate the man would not fly nor the crowd pursue. If we try to reduce fear to its bodily concomitants we merely substitute the concomitants for the reality expressed as fear. We denude the world of meanings for the sake of a theory, itself a false meaning which deprives us of all the rest. We can interpret experience only on the level of experience.[22]

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22. R. M. MacIver: <u>Society</u>, quoted by Ernest Nagel: "The subjective nature of social subject matter", in <u>Readings in the philosophy of the social sciences</u>, edited by May Brodbeck (New York, 1968), 41.

Before we leave a consideration of Collingwood's theory, one other point should be made here about re-enactment and explanation. For Collingwood, one consequence of re-enacting past thought is that to discover the thought behind an action and re-create it for oneself is to understand it.

> For science, the event is discovered by perceiving it, and the further search for its cause is conducted by assigning it to its class and determining the relation between that class and others. For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it. To discover that thought is already to understand it. After the historian has ascertained the facts, there is no further process of inquiring into their causes. When he knows what happened, he already knows why it happened.
>
> This does not mean that words like "cause" are necessarily out of place in reference to history; it only means that they are used there in a special sense. When a scientist asks "Why did that piece of litmus paper turn pink?" he means "On what kinds of occasions do pieces of litmus paper turn pink?" When an historian asks "Why did Brutus stab Caesar?" he means "What did Brutus think, which made him decide to stab Caesar?" The cause of the event, for him, means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is the inside of the event itself.[23]

This passage is chiefly relevant to problems in historical explanation, and I intend to look at some of those problems in a later chapter. It may be mentioned here, however, that seeing historical work as the re-enactment of past thought leads directly to an incorrect conception of how an explanation is appropriate or inappropriate to a historical context. What an agent thinks often has no bearing at all on an explanation of his action, although it may show his reasons for acting. The passage is also important because it brings up other problems: first, it points

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23. R. G. Collingwood: op. cit., 214-15.

out that history, unlike science, is concerned with the particular not with the general; second, it does suggest that there is a rather special sort of historical understanding, a concept I hope to develop later, for it must be stressed that there is more to history than simple explanation alone.

4. The inferential basis of historical knowledge

Both Oakeshott's and Collingwood's theories must be rejected as analyses of historical knowledge in its entirety or in its essence. Oakeshott's "history" tells us nothing about the past, and, as has been made clear, goes so far as to say that knowledge of the past is impossible; of course, a theory like this has certain attractions from a logical point of view, although Oakeshott's version is not intended to make a logical point. Collingwood's theory is unacceptable because it is unequivocally subjective, and because it too -- in a strange way -- denies the "pastness" of the subject-matter of history. An important consequence of Collingwood's conception of the "thought" that a historian re-enacts must be not that a thought endures through time but that it exists outside time. In any case, since it is the thought itself that matters, its original ownership by a particular historical agent seems to be largely a side issue: the actual historical features of any thought, by implication, seem to count for little in Collingwood's theory. Additionally,

thought itself, as actually re-enacted, and as the real subject of the historian's work and immediately his, must be considered to be something that is present. The usefulness of Collingwood's idea of re-enactment is that it provides a description of one way in which historical work goes on, so long as the more rigorous demands of the theory are not met; and it will be helpful to keep re-enactment in mind when rational explanation and intuition are discussed later.

The nature of historical knowledge, and the relation between the historian and his material, can be accounted for on the basis of inference. The answers to how the historian comes about his knowledge, and what the nature of that knowledge is, are fairly simple ones. It may seem that there are many problems to be resolved, but if there are, these are problems that belong to discussions within a general theory of epistemology -- for example, problems about the concepts of knowledge and belief, or about the justification of knowledge statements -- and they are in no way exclusive to history. They are not to be discussed here because my present concern is with how historical knowledge may sometimes seem inferior or different to knowledge in other empirical fields.

We come by our knowledge of historical facts in the same way as that in which we come by knowledge of other facts about the past and the present in everyday life. In some respects, obviously, the study of history will involve more developed or more logical techniques -- it is

one characteristic of the historian that he is able to use ordinary techniques more carefully and more rigorously; but there is no specifically historiographical principle underlying the gaining of historical knowledge (but I must emphasize that I am talking at the moment only of the establishment of descriptive historical fact). There are no epistemological problems peculiar to history, and so there is little cause to be concerned with the validity of any general theory of knowledge in a specifically historical context.

The historian's knowledge is founded on inference from material evidence. There obviously cannot be any direct knowledge of the past equivalent to that direct knowledge which we have in our immediate perception of the present. This does not make historical knowledge somehow inferior to our knowledge of the present, for truly direct knowledge forms only a small part of the body of present knowledge of any individual. Nor do the only inferential conclusions admissible to the sceptic, that is, those conclusions grounded in a logical necessity, form a very substantial part of our knowledge of the world. History is not significantly disadvantaged, in the way in which it infers its factual knowledge from evidence, when it is compared with other disciplines such as the physical sciences and the social sciences. This will be more readily agreed with when it is made clear in the next section that historians by no means rely in the main on the evidence of testimony or the accounts of previous writers, and other

intended records. It is from a knowledge of the truly wide variety of historical evidence, and experience of what that evidence means and what may be learned from it, that the historian, through informed inferential methods, builds up and extends factual knowledge of the past.

The inferences on which the historian relies, like the inferences of other disciplines, with the exception of deductive logic and mathematics, are fallible; but history is no worse in comparison with other disciplines. No empirical inferences guarantee the truth of factual statements: they are always

> inferences which, when the premisses are true and the reasoning correct, do not insure the truth of the conclusion, though they are held to make the conclusion "probable" in some sense and in some degree. Except in mathematics, almost all the inferences upon which we actually rely are of this sort. In some cases the inference is so strong as to amount to practical certainty.[24]

Whether the historian strictly infers his conclusions from the material evidence, or forms a hypothesis suggested by some aspect of the evidence or some historical problem which is later tested against that evidence or some other factual knowledge in order that it may be confirmed or refuted by it, is not a question that needs to be decided here.[25] It is probably the case that most historians do both. What matters is that the historian's factual statements are either formed or confirmed by a

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24. Bertrand Russell: Human knowledge -- its scope and limits (London, 1948), 178.

25. I am thinking particularly of Sir Karl Popper's ideas about the way in which the scientist comes to form his hypotheses. See especially The logic of scientific discovery (London, 1959).

process of reasoning that is in general straightforwardly inferential, and no more than that. Only those statements which are based on intuition constitute an exception here; and such intuitive factual statements will be looked at in a later section of this chapter.

What is to be emphasized is that there is no need to try to claim certainty for historical work by postulating some kind of direct historical knowledge, such as Oakeshott's "present experience" or Collingwood's "re-enactment". History may appear to be at some disadvantage to other fields of knowledge because its subject-matter, the past, is not present. However, if inductive inference is allowed in other fields of knowledge (with present subject-matter), then it must be admitted that historical inference too provides us with genuine and practically certain knowledge. Such inference is no more hazardous than scientific inference or the ordinary reasonings of everyday life: the practical certainty of its conclusions may be asserted with full justification.

The principal source of many arguments that historical inference is in some way especially uncertain is the belief that the historian's conclusions are almost all based on a consideration of materials of the same type, that is, testimony; and testimony may easily become the expression of the bias and prejudices of its author to the consequential detriment of its factual content. In the past such arguments might have been well founded; but in fact historians have not relied wholly or even largely on

testimonial sources and related materials, such as memoirs, records intended for posterity, and secondary historical accounts, for over a century. Indeed, the recent tendency of some historians has not seldom been to over-react to criticism of the use of testimony, with the result that they have discounted intentional records almost completely. In history today, historical conclusions are generally based on many different types of sources: for example, intentional records will be confirmed or placed in doubt by records that have been left unintentionally; contemporary accounts will be looked at in the light of archaeological discoveries; the written history of the past may be modified by the use of scientific methods such as radiocarbon dating. In the next section I intend to give some idea of the wide and varied grounds for historical conclusions provided by the different types of historical materials available for the researcher's examination.

5. Historical materials

By inductive and inferential methods the historian reaches certain conclusions about the past from the evidence of the materials open to him. It is important in any discussion of history that it is stated clearly just how varied historical materials really are. Some writers seem to suggest that for the most part the historian's work consists of the evaluation and criticism of testimony. In one passage, for example, Popper talks of the historian in a

way that equates his use of documentary evidence with the scientist's use of observations.[26] In truth, if one is asked to suggest material used in historical research, one will immediately think of examples of the so-called primary sources, such as written documentary material (for example, charters, deeds, wills and accounts), the better-known sorts of archaeological evidence, and (for more recent history) oral reports, and examples of secondary sources, which consist chiefly of previous written historical accounts and accounts taken from other, non-historical disciplines. Examples of different materials are rarely thought of at first; yet when the actual variety of historical material that can, and indeed must, be used by the historian is made clear, it should come as no surprise, for it is really quite obvious that the sources of history must be widespread.

Realization of the variety of the types of historical material that may provide useful information will lead to the development of a wider conception of the historian's world of evidence and eliminate at least one source of scepticism. One sceptical argument that should not survive a listing of the various types of historical material is that which is based on a (supposed) almost exclusive use of testimony by the historian; it claims that testimony is inherently unreliable and provides no basis for objective statements about the past, even when an attempt is made to establish the truth by comparing

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26. See Karl R. Popper: Objective knowledge (Oxford, 1972), 186.

and synthesizing different testimonies. This argument is easily refuted because testimony and intentional record need form only one part of the historian's source material. When testimonial material is made use of by the historian, it can, and indeed should, be confirmed or placed in doubt by evidential material which has been left behind by the people of the past with no thought for posterity. Many of the historian's factual conclusions from the use of testimony will receive objective corroboration from non-testimonial evidence.

What are some of these various sources of historical material? Apart from the more obvious records, in his establishment of statements of fact the historian may make use of such objects as coins and seals; he may be justified in reaching certain conclusions through a knowledge of place-names or family-names -- place-names, for instance, are a helpful aid in deciding who settled where when England was invaded by the various Anglo-Saxon peoples, and family-names provide a good deal of the evidence for determining the varying degrees of penetration of different areas by immigrant groups in the United States. Newspapers, magazines and pamphlets may be useful to the historian indirectly, as well as providing him directly with reported evidence of one kind or another: they can be greatly indicative of the differing attitudes of a particular period or country. Features like advertisements, in newspapers and elsewhere, can furnish the historian with much information that will be relevant to social

history. For local history, and even for more general history, buildings in their styles and their details will give useful information that may sometimes be completely undocumented. Portraits and paintings are a source of much background material for the more specific events of a period; notably, their importance may often be less direct than indirect: the anachronistic details of the paintings of the Italian and Flemish schools, for example, tell us nothing about the historical reference they often lay claim to, but they do tell us a good deal about the style of life of the society in which they were painted, with details which otherwise might be entirely lost to us. In cathedrals and churches monuments and effigies, and even the sometimes frivolous carvings on capitals or misericords, have left us useful historical details. And obviously artefacts in general have much to tell the person who is seeking historical knowledge.

Of course, the historian will often not have the necessary expertise to make satisfactory use directly of such non-testimonial sources. To a large extent he will rely on workers in other disciplines; indeed some of those disciplines may be considered as auxiliary to history proper. Archaeology and genealogy and heraldry all exist in their own right; but other disciplines may be thought of as existing only to serve more important studies: for example, the disciplines of paleography, diplomatic, epigraphy and sphragistics. In some fields non-historical disciplines will provide the historian with many important

contributions both to his knowledge and to his understanding of history.

It should not be forgotten that for more remote periods of history myth and saga, such as the works of Homer and some of the books of the Bible, may be used to establish certain historical facts. It is important to bear in mind that many facts are not discovered by a simple, direct reading of an ancient literary text: the material may be used both to provide us with a partial idea of the writer's society, and, through the application to it of general principles of certain types of society, to reveal to some extent the truth about the real historical events to which a myth relates. In a related way, the historian may "read between the lines" when he studies more modern historical sources. Even when the historian makes extensive use of those records intended by their writers for posterity he will rarely confine himself to using them straightforwardly for the information they purport to give, allowing himself to practise only surface criticism (for example, by taking note of the writer's prejudices, by verifying factual statements, or by comparing different accounts). Many written records give the historian information which their writer never intended to give and may not even have thought about.

It is obvious that the historian will require a good deal of specialized knowledge relevant to the materials he wishes to use. Indeed, if the knowledge used by him is very specialized and very extensive, his historical

work will seem that much more "scientific". So it may be: I am not suggesting that the historian requires no specialized training; clearly he does. There will be a body of basic techniques and procedures of historical research and writing to be learned. Nevertheless, much of what the historian learns about will not be historiography as such, but will be related to disciplines allied to history, and, according to his predilections, any other subjects possessing a possible historical interest. Much of the knowledge that is brought to bear on historical problems is not primarily a part of historiography proper; and it should therefore be considered to share in philosophical difficulties surrounding all empirical knowledge rather than in the supposed peculiar difficulties of historical knowledge.

6. Intuitive factual statements

Inference and induction are perhaps to be considered as the ideal way in which historical facts are to be established. In history, however, the application of general inductive methods, whether formally or informally, will not prove wholly adequate even simply for the establishment of facts about the past. It is where rational procedures are inadequate that an "unscientific" but very important feature of historical study comes into play: this feature is the historian's use of intuition in coming to his conclusions. Sometimes, less flatteringly, the use

of non-rational methods is called not intuition but guesswork; but "guesswork" is not a fair description of what the historian does, for his thinking is related, though not on a rational basis, to what happened in the past, and there is therefore a meaningful distinction to be made between intuition and genuine guesswork. Intuition serves two main purposes: it will suggest certain possible occurrences that will fill in the gaps left by the application of rational method, as well as help the historian to decide between opposing conclusions where the evidence for the one or the other is fairly evenly balanced, and it will sometimes lead the historian to go directly against what is seemingly the trend of the evidence in his conclusions.

Here are some examples of historical intuition at work in history:

> The slow and gradual manner in which parochial churches became independent appears to be of itself a sufficient answer to those who ascribe a great antiquity to the universal payment of tithes. There are, however, more direct proofs that this species of ecclesiastical property was acquired not only by degrees but with considerable opposition. We find the payment of tithes first enjoined by the canons of a provincial council in France, near the end of the sixth century. From the ninth to the end of the twelfth, or even later, it is continually enforced by similar authority. ... This reluctant submission of the people to a general and permanent tribute is perfectly consistent with the eagerness displayed by them in accumulating voluntary donations upon the church. Charlemagne was the first who gave the confirmation of a civil statute to these ecclesiastical injunctions; no one at least has, so far as I know, adduced any earlier law for the payment of tithes than one of his capitularies. But it would be precipitate to infer, either that the practice had not already gained ground to a considerable extent, through the influence of ecclesiastical authority, or, on the other hand, that it became universal in consequence of the commands of Charlemagne.[27]

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27. Henry Hallam: View of the state of Europe during the Middle Ages (London, 1856), 142-43.

It cannot be said that the evidence Hallam puts before us here, and in the footnotes accompanying the passage, ought to be considered sufficient for him to infer a factual conclusion of any sort -- whether that tithes were regularly and universally paid before the time of Charlemagne, or that they were an infrequent custom until Charlemagne's capitulary led to their becoming a universal practice, or, for that matter, that tithes were paid in an erratic fashion both before and after Charlemagne. Hallam seems to see the recurrence of regulations relating to the same subject as evidence for a largely continuous and regular increase in the slow development of the practice of tithing; yet, quite reasonably, in another context, the repetition of legislation could be seen as evidence that the practice it relates to was not being followed. Hallam's statement about a gradual but reluctant increase in the practice of tithing over the centuries, working principally as a growing custom reinforced by occasional explicit legislation, convinces the reader, if indeed it does convince him, not by the evidence presented, but rather by what initially must be described as a general feeling of rightness about the conclusion. This feeling of "rightness" is created by an understanding of the events of a period considered together and as a whole, rather than by an examination and explanation of discrete events; and this understanding is made over to the reader through the general structure of a passage and in the way the historian arranges his material. The intuitive foundations of a

conclusion are implicit in the material of a historical account, and they could only be stated explicitly through an exposition as unconvincing in itself as it would be laborious. If the reader concurs in a historian's intuitive conclusions then the intuitive understanding of events has been successfully conveyed by the historian in his account. This belongs properly to the topic of historical understanding, and I shall be developing the theme of "intuition" further when I come to consider explanation and understanding in history in a later chapter.

The intuitive judgment of Hallam leads to a purportedly factual statement about the past. The second way in which the historian may give scope to his intuitive ideas is in the proposal of factual alternatives for which there is little or no evidence at all. Thus, by saying "Whether or not he [Henry] had any hand in his brother's death in the New Forest, he moved very quickly," a modern historian suggests in passing that the death of William Rufus may not have been an accident; but he does not assert it for a fact and he does not adduce any evidence to support his suggestion, and he freely admits in a footnote that the suggestion here is "pure speculation".[28] What is noteworthy is that historians not infrequently commit such speculations to writing, and in doing this they may leave behind an idea that will prove fertile in later research.

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28. See John Le Patourel: "The Norman succession, 996-1135", English Historical Review, 86 (1971), 243.

The third type of statement to be considered in this section is the hypothetical statement. Historical hypotheticals about events that did not happen must be held to be based on intuitive reasoning. Since general laws, because of the complexity of history, are usually of little positive use for the historian's conclusions in their final stage, and since there are no sources of evidence about events that did not happen, only intuition can ordinarily be the basis of such statements. Hypothetical statements do have an importance in history: they serve in a rhetorical way to emphasize what the historian has said about actual events or actual personalities, and to give an increased depth to his judgments and conclusions about them by suggesting what dangers may have been avoided or what opportunities missed in the real course of events. The following passage is an example of a hypothetical statement in a work of history, where intuition alone must be held to be the basis of the historian's statement.

> It is hardly open to question that this brilliant lord of well-trained myriads [Alexander] would have advanced to the conquest of the West; nor can we affect to doubt that, succeeding where one of his successors failed, he would have annexed Sicily and Great Hellas, conquered Carthage and overrun the Italian peninsula. To apprehend what his death meant for Europe we need not travel farther in our speculations. To the Indies he would certainly have returned and carried out with fresh troops that project of visiting the valley of the Ganges which had been frustrated by his weary army. ... It is needless to add that if Alexander had lived another quarter of a century, he would have widened the limits of geographical knowledge. The true nature of the Caspian Sea would have been determined; the southern extension of the Indian peninsula would have been discovered; and an attempt would have been made to repeat the Phoenician circumnavigation of Africa. Nor could Alexander have failed,

> in his advanced position on the Jaxartes, to have learned some facts about the vast extension of the Asiatic continent to the east and north, and the curiosities of Chinese civilisation.[29]

As an example of a hypothetical statement in history, this passage attains an untypical complexity; it is also a surprising passage as it occurs in the work of an avowedly "scientific" historian. If it is looked at analytically, the hypothetical content of the statements above depend on so many other particular conditions for their fulfilment that any relation to the actual facts, in so far as they could be the basis for the historian's speculations, is a very tenuous one. The historian's case rests on an extensive intuitive perception of what would have been the case in many fields if just one condition, the death of Alexander, had been changed. In an important way, hypothetical statements in history are unlike other statements resulting from an intuitive approach in that, as is obvious, they cannot be tested. They are best regarded, as I have said, not as presenting a type of "genuine" hypothesis but as a rhetorical device that serves to emphasize some point the historian wishes to make, which, in Bury's case, is the greatness of Alexander.

It should now be clear how the historian sets about formulating his factual statements; he does it not simply by means of inductive inference from the evidence of historical material but also by the intuition of factual or hypothetical circumstances implied by that evidence when it is fully understood.

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29. J. B. Bury: A history of Greece (London, 1906), 822.

7. The existence of established facts in history

Through an examination of various historical materials and the use of inference and induction, on the one hand, and his intuition, or feeling for the evidence, on the other, the historian is able to formulate a body of factual historical statements. From his factual knowledge he will be able to proceed to explanatory and interpretive conclusions. About the way the historian prefers one interpretive conclusion to another there is little to be said at this point; how the historian himself prefers one conclusion to another and how the reader comes to prefer one historical conclusion above others present problems that will be considered at a later stage along with other topics. The initial historical task, that is, the establishment of historical facts, is, logically considered, a fairly straightforward business. For the most part, it will either have an acceptable basis in common sense or else be founded on sound inductive reasoning. The factual account, with its substantiation and the inferences by which it proceeds, will be open to criticism according to commonly accepted objective principles.

Against critics who would hold that <u>all</u> the factual statements of history are open to sceptical doubts it must be made clear that a very large number of facts are established beyond doubt in history; and such established facts do not relate simply to physical aspects of the past but also to the feelings and attitudes of individuals. Any

work of history contains an important proportion of indisputable facts; for example:

> Led by the Gepids, the various tribes of Goths, Rugii, Sueves, and Heruls inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Huns at the River Nedao (453) and drove them back into the Russian plains, only a few scattered bands remaining in Hungary.[30]

This statement is about purely "physical" facts, although the phrase 'crushing defeat' implies that the historian has made an evaluative judgment, however rudimentary.[31]

The following passage, however, contains quite indisputable facts about the attitudes of people involved in a particular historical event:

> In April 1918 in the aftermath of military reversals in Europe the Lloyd George government decided to extend conscription to Ireland. In order to make its decision more palatable to the Irish Nationalists the government also decided to grant home rule as well. It was quickly apparent that this dual policy was unacceptable to the Irish, Nationalist and Unionist alike, and in the charged emotional atmosphere of the next few weeks a compromise solution was sought to the problem.[32]

Here there are indisputable statements not only about actual physical facts, but also about a decision, the unpalatability and unacceptability of that decision to certain people, and the charged emotional atmosphere consequent on that. Given the evidence, such conclusions are inescapable, and must be acknowledged as factual and objective.

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30. H. St. L. B. Moss: The birth of the Middle Ages 395-814 (Oxford, 1935), 53.

31. Ideally, one would like to deal with really simple historical statements of fact such as 'The Battle of Hastings happened in 1066'. Statements of this type, however, though they are attractive philosophically, occur almost not at all in actual historical accounts.

32. John Kendle: "Federalism and the Irish Problem in 1918", History, 56 (1971), 207.

In addition there can be indisputable statements involving a historian's value-judgments; for example, there can be no quarrel that England was hospitable to political exiles who came to live there in the last century, as is claimed in the following passage:

> England in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was more hospitable to political exiles and refugees than perhaps any other European country of the time. It gave shelter to fallen emperors, such as Napoleon III, and to communist revolutionaries, such as Marx and Engels; to Russian aristocrats such as Herzen, and to Italian nationalists such as Garibaldi and Mazzini.[33]

It needs to be mentioned, nevertheless, that any agreement here about the value-judgment of the historian, vis-à-vis England's hospitality, does not have regard to whether hospitality as such is good or bad but only to whether, given the current meaning of "hospitality", the word can in the context be correctly predicated of England. The objective agreement that underlies the established fact here should therefore be analysed as factual and lexicographical and not directly valuational. The use of a word like "hospitable" generally connotes approval; yet disapproval could still be expressed within the passage as it stands. The basis of agreement on the historian's value-judgment may be said to be relative to that scheme of values within which "hospitable" is defined.[34]

That facts like those in the passages cited above can be considered as quite definitely established should

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33. Lionel Kochan: "Lenin in London", History Today, 20 (1970), 229.

34. For further discussion of the difficulties concerning absolute agreement on values see below, chap. IV, sects. 4 and 7.

give considerable encouragement to the proponents of objective history. The evidence supporting such statements of fact is of an objective nature, the way in which the conclusions are arrived at follows an objective (commonly accepted) pattern, and the conclusions themselves must therefore be allowed to be objective. Furthermore, the factual objectivity of such statements provides a firm basis for the progress of historical argument.

If it is said, however, that such facts are established beyond doubt, it should not be understood that this entails that they cannot possibly be untrue. The historian who arrives at conclusions about the past and embodies them in factual and objective statements like those cited above may well be proved wrong in the future. To talk of such statements as established beyond doubt is to be understood in the manner of all empirical disciplines as signifying established beyond reasonable doubt; firm statements of fact make no claim to be irrefutable, but they are established as soundly as anything ever is in everyday life, and there is no reason for us to be harder on historians than on ourselves when we talk of "established facts". The established facts of history, like the established facts of everyday life and other empirical disciplines, have such a high degree of probability that to treat them as uncertain would leave nothing in the world that was certain. When such established facts are proved wrong, of course, support is given to extreme scepticism; but there is no support for the more positive

type of historical relativism which would assert that one can be peculiarly sceptical about historical knowledge alone.

It can be usefully pointed out in this context that if a historical statement of fact is proved false, this does not mean that it is not "objective". One basis for the argument against historical objectivity is that the historian's conclusions, because they are about the past, are especially uncertain. That a statement of fact is objectively established does not entail that it is true; nor, when the number of statements that are incorrect or incomplete or unsatisfactory turns out to be relatively high, does this entail that the study of history is largely a subjective business. A conclusion objectively come to may very well be found to be an incorrect one, and not necessarily only when the evidence for it is found to need reconsideration. Historical work may be both objective and uncertain simultaneously. The uncertainty of much written history is a definite fact, and it cannot be ignored by either historians or philosophers of history. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to repeat that many facts of history are established beyond reasonable doubt.

8. The historian's involvement with history

The establishment of facts is only part of the historian's work. Considered solely in themselves, passages in historical accounts containing statements of established

fact, like those I quoted above, must appear to be strangely sterile. Earlier in this work I affirmed that history is more than a mere assemblage of facts, and this is generally agreed by all those who write about the nature of history. The historian must do more than assemble material, and he must also go beyond purely analytic explanation and interpretation: he must explain to his audience why what happened did happen, with regard to broader and less immediate causes and conditions, and he will often provide understanding of his topic in its totality and in many cases make clear the contingent inevitability of historical events.

Of course the scientist too gives us to understand that things happen in one way rather than in another. In this regard, however, there are two ways in which the relationship between the historian and the material with which he works differs from that between the scientist and his material. Firstly, the scientist's explanations are ultimately based on general laws, and this cannot be said of all the explanations that a historian feels are satisfactory in history: but this point must be left to one side for discussion in a later chapter. Secondly, the historian is involved in both a social and personal way with his material; and this involvement must be examined here. The historian and his readers too are part of the course of history; as Tapp has pointed out:

> Unlike the physical scientist, the ... historian cannot stand so far apart from his problems. Thinking about the past makes meaningful the space-time

continuum within the penumbra of which he is a living, sentient part.[35]

Because the historian is a member of a society, because he is a thinking and feeling social being, and because history is precisely about men thinking and feeling in their social life, and in a social life that has in many cases undoubtedly affected his own society, he must, if he finds any interest and derives any true meaning from his studies of the past, in some way see history as belonging, however indeterminately, to himself. Societies which have no historical sense (as we understand it), and which have little written history as such, have in many fields an orientation of their attitudes that is almost incomprehensible to us; and the members of that society, including even the most cultured among them, have their own ideas and feelings partly determined by a tradition of the past from which the priority normally accorded to pure truth in history is absent. The earlier Middle Ages provide a good example of such a society.[36] Nonetheless, even here, in a society unfamiliar with our concept of historical truth, the personal, social, and religious needs of men in society partly created the medieval conception of history; and the truth about the past was conceived in such a way that it was still very much a living and meaningful part of man's intellectual life. The conception of the historical past and the conception of the social present

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35. G. J. Tapp: "Knowing the past", Journal of Philosophy, 55 (1958), 464.

36. Cf. H. O. Taylor: The mediaeval mind (London, 1911), I, 77-86.

must always come to mould one another. Our historical sense determines and is determined by present attitudes in many fields of knowledge; and it is a sense that is continuously modified and transformed so as to remain a living part of our experience. An examination of the past events that constitute and determine his own historical sense and his own sense of the present cannot fail to have an importance for the historian, even if it never happens that he makes this personal importance explicit to himself. The historian personally is deeply involved with his studies.

How precisely does this real involvement of the historian with the material of his work affect the results of his work, the historical account? Involvement has three effects: the achievement of factual objectivity in history is much more difficult than its achievement in science; when factual objectivity has been achieved, it may be easily compromised by valuational and interpretive attitudes extraneous to the facts as such; and the historian's involvement with history, as it is manifested in the completed historical account, has an importance for his readers and for their understanding of his work and of the past itself.

Firstly, as I have said, the historian's involvement with history has considerable significance with regard to the attainment of historical objectivity. For science it is the very apartness of its subject-matter which makes objectivity a relatively straightforward and

uncontentious point in considerations of method. To put it simply: mind, or intellect, or feeling, that is to say, man's "mental side", as it may be called, is not involved directly as an object of consideration for the physical sciences. The materials and the subject-matter of science are simply objects in the physical world, even if they are only hypothetical objects, such as sub-atomic particles; indisputably, therefore, they are open to simple objective scrutiny. Of course, this is also the case with the primary materials of history; but, whereas the description, interpretation, and explanation of scientific facts continue to relate to an objective world, in so far as scientists have formulated and accepted universally certain fixed principles of scientific procedure, the description, interpretation, explanation, and understanding of historical facts relates to a considerable and essential extent to the rational, spiritual, and emotional world of man, conceived both individually and holistically (socially). The non-physical elements of history cannot be eliminated: they form an important part of what history is about, and some of them cannot be accommodated within fixed and accepted working principles. To attempt to consider history objectively after the manner of the physical sciences at least, or to reduce it perhaps to some sort of behavioural discipline, would in many cases lead to an elimination of the truly characteristic features of history. The "personal", mental subject-matter of history, therefore, makes historical objectivity much more difficult to attain than

scientific objectivity, because the former cannot come under the simple objective scrutiny of the latter. The mental side of history is not only part of the subject-matter: it also has its place in the historian's approach to his subject. It provides a basis for the historian's involvement, and in some cases identification, with his subject. If the non-physical in history is ineradicable, then criticism of a historian's results must, for some purposes, also take place through involvement and not through apartness.

For history, the historian's involvement with his historical subject-matter entails that the work being done, in its conception and completion, can never be entirely separated from the individual who is doing the work. This may well be a prime reason that the true social sciences (that is, excluding history), which also have for their subject-matter material in which a worker must of intrinsic necessity be involved, cannot at the moment, and would seem never to be likely to be able to, fulfil their aspirations to become true and proper sciences grounded on universally applicable general laws.[37]

Since the subject of this thesis is the relationship between historical objectivity and the individual historian, I feel it should be emphasized here that this ineliminable personal involvement of the historian with the past, as I have outlined it above, is one of the foundations of

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37. The worker in the social sciences is not always involved in his subject in the same way as the historian: his involvement may be contemporary and immediate.

the importance of the historian as an individual in historical work. The central significance of involvement will be developed still further when the individuality of historical understanding is discussed in a later chapter. The point to be made in this connection is that, because the historian must involve himself, and often, to a certain degree, identify himself, with his subject-matter, and because that subject-matter is the particular and not the general, so work that is particular requires a worker who is individual. Historical work is frequently the poorer when individuality is suppressed: historical involvement requires the historian's individuality.

The second effect of the historian's personal involvement with his material is that this involvement allows the relativist initially a much stronger case than if it were straightforwardly conceded that historical objectivity required the historian to keep a certain distance between himself and his subject. It goes without saying that involvement makes the nature of the objectivity that is possible in history much more difficult to establish. If, we may ask, it is going to be maintained that involvement and objectivity are in some way compatible with each other, what is to be said about all those features of a historian's personality which must surely be extraneous to historical fact as such, features which, unless they are inhibited by the historian, must seem at the best to colour such fact and at the worst to distort it seriously? Yet, if we are to hold to a theory of the personal involvement

of the historian with his work, surely such features can no longer be considered extraneous to history?

It is said that if bias is making itself felt in historical work, then the conscientious historian can make sincere attempts to eradicate it. However, if the historian succeeded in removing all trace of his personality from his work in order to present the true, objective, "scientific" account (and the elimination of any expression of his personality would appear to be the best way of destroying some of the possible sources of bias), then he would have succeeded in making his history something totally apart from himself; and apartness of this sort is something that does not belong to history. If it is true that history is not to tolerate a scientific apartness, then personality cannot be finally removed from it. It would seem prima facie that the relativist need not even take the trouble to argue his position. I hope to show later that this is not the case at all: the historian's personal involvement with his subject-matter, including even his pursuit of the proof of his own historical thesis, with his own understanding of events, in no way precludes the possibility of historical objectivity. These problems are better left, though, until relativism can be given a proper consideration.

Thirdly, the involvement of the historian with his subject-matter is of considerable importance for his audience, in particular for its understanding of his finished historical work. The reader of history to an extent comes

to reflect in his involvement the writer of history. Just as the historian is not wholly apart from his subject, so, on the reader's side, there must be a personal involvement with the subject if what is history for the historian is to be history for the reader and comprehended by him. If a historical account is to be completely understood, the reader cannot be apart from it any more than the historian can. Without historical involvement it can be only a dead thing, rather than alive and meaningful. The understanding of history can only come through a reader's involvement: without this all the historian's efforts, with his public in mind, are wholly in vain. The final stage of a historian's explanation and interpretation must be an attempt to grant the reader scope for his involvement; he must enable the reader to understand in some complete way the historical events related. Without this final, synthetic understanding, the reader may find the account technically satisfactory while it remains nothing more for him than a collection of cold, remote facts. Here is to be found another difference between history and science: the historian understands his material internally whereas the scientist does so externally; thus in a special way history needs to be personally and inwardly understood by the historian and his reader. A full treatment of understanding, however, must be left until I come to discuss historical explanation and interpretation in detail.

I should wish to say that history, to be fully history, must be understood, or at least understandable, and

that the understanding of history requires a personal involvement. In some ways this personal involvement can be identified with the "vital interest" of the historian or reader as that is conceived, for example, by Croce. I do not wish to emphasize this "vital interest" to the extent that historical truth (according to the general modern conception of such a phrase) is subjugated to the demands of the present, as seems to be the case in Croce's own theory.[38] Nevertheless, the Crocean distinction between history and chronicle is an interesting one, for it shows how important attitudes are in history. This distinction, which is of central importance for Croce, is not made in the usual way, which I have already discussed, by distinguishing plain narrative and significant narrative, but is determined by the presence of one of two different spiritual attitudes towards the historical work in question.[39] For Croce, the question whether a written account in front of us is to be denominated history or chronicle is a question that is answered by a consideration of the extrinsic relationship (extrinsic, that is, as the realist would see it) between the work and the mind or spirit of a particular person, rather than by an examination of any of the intrinsic qualities of the work itself. A historical narrative is Crocean "history" if we are vitally interested

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38. This seems to be the gist of the relevant passages of Croce's Logic (trans. Douglas Ainslie, London, 1917). See especially Part II, chaps. 3 and 4 of that book.

39. Plain and significant narratives are treated above, chap. II, sect. 5.

in the topic of that narrative immediately while we are reading it.[40]

Without adopting the extreme philosophical consequences of Croce's position, we can admit that what Croce said does usefully emphasize that history is characterized by our interest in it, by a certain meaningfulness that it possesses for us. Now that the implications of the historian's involvement with his historical work have been set out and, hopefully, rendered understandable, it will be useful to consider next some of the ways in which this involvement will become apparent to the reader of a historical account. In the next chapter, among considerations of other topics, I hope to show that some of the modes of involvement can always be considered legitimate in historical work, that is to say, they do not of necessity impede historical objectivity, whereas other forms of involvement present dangers for objectivity and truth. It should be made clear, however, that I am not suggesting the suppression of some degrees of involvement of the historian with his subject-matter, but rather the avoidance by him, if he wishes to write an objectively true account of the past, of some of the ways into which that involvement may be channelled in expression.

The historian is involved in his work through his beliefs and feelings and attitudes. These may appear in

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40. Cf. Theory and history of historiography, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London, 1915), chap. 1; and "History, chronicle, and pseudo-history", in Philosophy, poetry, history, trans. Cecil Sprigge (London, 1966).

many ways. There are four principal ways which I intend to examine: two ways which will be examined in the next chapter are to be found in those explicit judgments which are made by the historian and which are of a moral or other valuational nature, and those judgments that are implicit in the language the historian uses; in later chapters I shall look at the problem of selection (although one aspect of selection forms the subject of one section of the next chapter) and the problem of the arrangement and balancing of various elements of a historical account as they are achieved individually by different historians.

Before I proceed to an examination of the manifestations of involvement it will be necessary for me to look briefly at the causative factors behind the degree and manner of the historian's involvement. In the next chapter, therefore, my discussion will take as points of reference certain problems of relativism, or, more precisely, certain features of historiography which are held to justify the relativist's objections to the historian's claims of objectivity.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have intended to show how the historian and his material are connected, and what the initial steps are towards making of his material a historical account. In the last section I made the point

that the historian is not to, and cannot, regard himself, or be regarded by others, as "apart" from his subject-matter in the same way as the scientist, or at least the physical scientist, may. I have stated that personal involvement is very much an integral part of the historian's understanding of history. If I have said that this involvement should be present in historical work, it is also true that I have not yet adequately explained why it should be present; this must wait until I am able to deal properly in a later chapter with historical understanding. This chapter may be concluded with a brief explanation of why it is that involvement is a matter that must concern the individual historian.

History deals with the past of man in his social life. Consequently, in its account of the past, it is necessarily concerned with human actions, human thoughts, and human feelings. It is precisely this essential human aspect of history which requires and entails the historian's involvement. If the study of history were to become something apart from the historian, it would lose this human aspect, it would no longer be about men as persons; and as a result it would cease to be history. Social life as we understand it (which is what history is about) requires the participation of persons expressly in order that it be social. A behavioural approach to history might provide adequate results as history was approximated more and more to the social sciences; for instance, it can prove extremely useful in economic history and, in

some ways, social history. But where a historical account is about individuals, a language of behaviour alone is inadequate: what individuals do in history is too complex to be described satisfactorily by a behavioural account. To relate coherently an individual's actions and intentions and thoughts, with the employment of "mental" language, is a very difficult business, which is intimately bound up with the attitude of the particular historian to the individual in question. The differing psychological, as well as social, conditioning of historians must mean that, with the rarest chance exceptions, no two historians, doing detailed work, will ever evaluate every action of a historical individual in an exactly parallel fashion. There can be no question of achieving a compromise between historians, of reaching a "correct" historical synthesis through the collation and criticism of the varying evaluations of different histories. To claim that a certain individual, in committing a certain action, was foolhardy or bold, is a judgment on the whole individual and is in rapport with all the judgments on other actions of that individual. Such judgments cannot be suppressed, for they finally ensure the characterization of historical individuals as persons. These judgments, linked as they are to the value-scheme of an individual observer, are necessarily made by an individual, and only have their full meaning when they are considered in this light. They are a product of the historian's conditioning and development both socially and psychologically; and because these are to be

found ultimately different in every case, they are uniquely his together with the value-judgments they engender. Of course, a historian may be induced to change his opinion under the influence of other individuals: this does not mean, however, that the new judgment is somehow a "joint" one, the result of an impersonal effort at synthesis. The historian may change his mind, but his new opinion is still his own individual one.

Such evaluative judgments are essential to historical accounts of man in the past. How it is that differences between historians in their judgments need not be a hindrance to historical objectivity is still to be discussed and explained.

IV

SOME PROBLEMS OF RELATIVISM

1. The enduring value of a historical account

The nature and extent of the subjective element in historical accounts is a perennial problem in the philosophy of history. Some historians, especially in the last century when the idea of "scientific" history was rapidly gaining ground in academic circles, came to take it almost for granted that an objective account was possible not only in theory but in practice as well. This nineteenth-century conception of history was expressed in the well-known dictum of Ranke that the task of the historian was to describe the past as it really had been. Still, even some "scientific" historians, while they sincerely attempted to apply rigorous objective principles in their working procedures, saw and accepted the validity of a relativist viewpoint on the value of historical work. J. B. Bury, for instance, did not hesitate to admit that the historian was a product of his own time:

> The point of view of the historian is conditioned by the mentality of his own age; the focus of his vision is determined within narrow limits by the conditions of contemporary civilization.[1]

So it was that Bury went on to say of the historian, in

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1. The ancient Greek historians, 252; quoted by J. B. Black: The art of history (London, 1926), 9.

much the same way as the relativist of today not infrequently does:

> There can be nothing final about his judgments, and their permanent interest lies in the fact that they are judgments pronounced at a given epoch and are characteristic of the tendencies and ideas of that epoch.[2]

It is not easy to believe, however, that historians generally take this view of their own work; and the historical value of much of Bury's own work itself has shown an impressive durability. Ever since historians began to write history the ambition of most of them has probably ensured that they frequently have the same intention as Thucydides, who could state unequivocally that his work was 'not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever'.[3]

Relativist statements about historical work are to be found in the writings of historians; although when a historian makes a statement supporting relativism in an extreme form, his theory is likely to be belied by the way he actually carries out his historical work. Positions of pure, irremediable relativism are most unambiguously taken up by philosophers.

The relativist position in the philosophy of history can take several forms. Croce, for example, with his doctrine of a historical "vital interest", adopts with assurance the theory that the historian is not primarily

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2. Ibid.

3. Thucydides: History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, 1954), 24-25.

concerned with the past at all: his statement that all history is contemporary history is to be taken quite literally; history is created by the immediate present interests of the historian. Thus Croce can maintain that different individuals can write conflicting yet equally valid and true histories of the same subject.[4]

This kind of deeply philosophical position, a consequence of Croce's idealism, is not, however, a commonly held relativist position. The more straightforward kind of relativism presents arguments that have an understandable appeal for immediate acceptance by anyone who reflects on history. Mandelbaum has summarized succinctly the more common relativist arguments; the relativist holds, he writes,

> that no historical account can faithfully depict the past since, first, the actual occurrences of history are richer in content than any account of them can possibly be; second, because the continuity and structure which historical works necessarily possess do not afford a true parallel to the continuity and structure which characterize the events of history; and, third, because the historian of necessity passes value-judgments, and these are relevant to the present but not to the past.[5]

The relativist claims that the truth of a historical work can only be grasped and judged when the context of the narrative is referred to the psychological and social context of its composition. We must not only understand what is said, but also why it is said. And it is undeniable that every occurrence described by the historian is

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4. See especially "History, chronicle, and pseudo-history", in Philosophy, poetry, history, trans. Cecil Sprigge (London, 1966).

5. Maurice Mandelbaum: The problem of historical knowledge (New York, 1967), 36.

demonstrably richer in content than his account of it, and that the historian cannot recapture in his depiction of an event the sense of immediacy experienced by those in the thick of many events. Even from all that material with which he is acquainted the historian does not take everything, but selects certain aspects of the events he describes and ignores others; in consequence, he gives to the events narrated a structure or pattern which the original occurrence did not possess. The relativist also holds, importantly, that historical knowledge is value-charged: the historian constructs his account under the dominance of his own particular values, from a valuational standpoint derived from the present.[6]

Most thinkers, of course, are not to be found taking up the two positions of relativism and anti-relativism in the most extreme way possible; yet it is clearly the case that many philosophers and historians believe that the writer of history suffers some type of disability in his attempts to think about the past and create an objective account of it, by reason of his being a product of a particular time and place.

In this chapter I wish to concentrate on the problem of the social and psychological factors involved in the historian's work, and on the related problem of the values a historian brings to his work and the value-judgments they may lead him to make as he writes his account of the past.

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6. Cf. ibid., chap. I.

The historian probably finds it easier to adhere to a statement that an objective historical account of past events is possible: as I have said, an objective account has always been the aim of most conscientious historians in the past. This is true when it is taken into account that the term "objectivity" has sometimes come to be applied in what from some points of view seem strange ways, as, for example, in the historiography of the Soviet Union and the communist countries of eastern Europe: there is no immediate reason to attribute disingenuousness to those who talk of "historical objectivity" after their own fashion.

Since for most historians objectivity has been a goal that it is believed practically possible to attain, it is not surprising to find that Ranke and other historians in the confident atmosphere of the nineteenth century had few doubts concerning the possibility of objectivity. Even Bury, in the passage I cited above, was probably thinking not so much about the impossibility of objective history as about the probability that scientific history, if properly carried out, would be superseded by the work of later historians in much the same way as scientific discoveries and theories, even in the pure sciences, are modified and improved by later developments, or even rendered obsolete and supplanted by them. Only in this century have historians not only come to see that relativism presents very real problems for them as working historians, but, in some cases, actually admitted that

their accounts of the past must be considered irreducibly relativistic.

Nevertheless, the historian who has admitted the impossibility of final objectivity in his own work rarely seems to reach the position where he would be prepared to assert that the accounts he has produced are scarcely, or not significantly, or not at all, about past events. Perhaps it is natural that such a view should be held by philosophers, particularly by those with idealist tendencies such as Croce; even the most admittedly relativist of historians must surely baulk at developing the idea in his actual historical work that he is concerned with his own present interests or with making -- if he follows Oakeshott -- a special sort of statement about present facts.

It must also be assumed that historians do not believe that their work, ostensibly and actually about the past, has in fact only an enduring value in so far as it is informative about their own period and society. It is true that historical work always is, or at least is always able to be, superseded. But can this really mean that the permanent interest of a historical work lies in its being typical of a given age? Do many people actually find the enduring, central interest of Gibbon's work, for example -- and Gibbon provides a more favourable case than most historians -- in that in some of its aspects it is illustrative of, and informative about, the eighteenth century? Certainly, one of the chief interests of The decline and fall of the Roman Empire is what it tells us about Gibbon

as well as about his society; and this is a point, incidentally, which shows how important the personality of the historian can actually be in his work. All the same, in the end it must be affirmed that whatever an accomplished work of history tells us about the historian and his society is quite secondary to what it tells us about the historian's chosen subject-matter. As well as for its literary qualities, Gibbon's work is certainly read, despite all its undisguised emotional attitudes and outright prejudice, as a work of history, and a very great work of history. Even for the advanced scholar Gibbon is important as a landmark in the development of the study of ancient history, and can prove to be an important background work for some studies of the period and its problems. Of course, to say all this is in no way to deny that the age in which The decline and fall was written will throw light on its limitations and deficiencies.

The sort of statement that Bury makes presents us, if we take it literally, with an immediately paradoxical view: that to read a work of history is to learn more about the historian's age than about his supposed historical subject. It is a paradoxical view because, when the argument is thought about and carried to its logical consequence, it will be seen that it invalidates its own point. To read a history book, it should follow, is not even to find out about the historian who wrote it, for since we ourselves are creatures of our own age as we read the book, in our study of history we only really learn about ourselves.

Bury's statement says nothing about the intentions of the historian as he sets about his work. The historian has certainly never accepted that his work only concerns the subjective present; nor has he accepted that his work, even for any future audience, is not primarily about the subject he has chosen rather than about himself. The historian has always believed it to be his task to give an account of the past; and he has always believed that he has carried this task out, at least to the best of his ability. Of course, it is a valid criticism of some professed historians that their work does tell us more about them than about their historical subject. Lytton Strachey provides a good example of what it can really mean for a historian to tell us about himself.

From here on I shall take it for granted that all historians believe that they are in one way or another telling us about the past, and that for most of them this is overtly their primary aim. It is obvious that philosophical interpretations of historical facts in terms of something other than past events cannot in the end ring true for the historian. It is difficult to think that any historian who began to take a theory like Croce's or Oakeshott's seriously -- in his practical work -- could go on writing a historical narrative much as he had done before.

Despite a certain implausibility in the notion of a historical account that is not to be considered primarily informative about the past, it is true to say that in this

century many historians, particularly in the English-speaking world, have come to reject the idea, at least in any theoretical statements they may make, that their accounts are really objective; nor do they believe even that objective accounts are possible. However, this relativism that is to be found in genuine historical thinking could perhaps be characterized initially as a fairly reasonable type. Beard, for example, writes that

> any selection and arrangement of facts pertaining to any large area of history, either local or world, race or class, is controlled inexorably by the frame of reference in the mind of the selector and arranger. This frame of reference includes things deemed necessary, things deemed possible, and things deemed desirable.[7]

It is interesting to note that Beard, as a professional historian who was influenced by Croce and who was one of the more unashamedly relativistic of historians, in a very unCrocean way saw one of the tasks of the historian as the arrangement of facts. In saying this, Beard, clearly, believed that the "bare" facts of history were in one way or another knowable to the historian. This point of view is typical of historians in general, since, for historians, relativist problems occur not in the collection of data but after the facts have been established. Difficulties of relativism arise when the facts are transmuted into an account through selection and arrangement and through interpretation and understanding. The historian seems rarely to be concerned with the problem that he may never even be able to establish historical facts.

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7. "Written history as an act of faith", in The philosophy of history in our time, ed. Hans Meyerhoff (New York, 1959), 150-51.

In seeing the problem of relativism in this way the historian may be ignoring certain deeper philosophical problems, as whether "bare facts" are even truly conceivable. What the historian thinks of as elementary facts of history are undoubtedly in many cases the results of sophisticated historical judgments and interpretations of evidence. Nevertheless, certain facts, or more properly statements of fact -- no matter how complex their formulation has been -- are almost universally agreed on and accepted by historians of many societies and many ages. Relativist problems arise in history when these accepted facts form the basis of further historical judgments and interpretations. The historian is right, therefore, to separate for practical purposes fact and interpretation in the way that he does.

2. Relativism in arrangement and selection

In so far as the historian encounters problems of relativism in history he will find that many of them are connected with the possibility of an objective selection and arrangement of historical facts in order to construct an account, as a whole, that will be both true and comprehensible. In this respect the practical difficulties thrown up by relativism centre on the question "In what ways can a historian's treatment of nothing but true facts lead to a narrative of past events that is historically unsatisfactory?"

In his paper "Can history be objective?"[8] Morton White cites the simple example of a historian who is constructing a historical narrative from a list of American presidents. How can a process of selection lead to the construction of a narrative which is misleading or inaccurate? White points out that

> if selection simply means paring down the original list (known to be true), the result of selection will also be true. Any part of a true conjunction remains true. And surely any re-ordering of the true statements on the original list will also be true by virtue of well-known properties of conjunctions.[9]

White goes on to show that the problem of historical selection emphasizes the point that it is ideally the task of the historian to tell the whole truth, or, more realistically, to give us a narrative that is representative of the whole truth.

The key word in a consideration of relativist problems in historical work is precisely this term "representative": the historian cannot tell (literally) the whole truth, but his work must be representative of the truth about that particular segment of the past to which he has directed his attention. It is clearly the case that any historical narrative is more than simply the sum of its facts. As I pointed out in talking of plain and significant narratives, no historical account treats of plain facts; even without the complexities of explanation being taken into account, the relation of facts in a historical narrative is more than the simple conjunction of "a and b and c..." Even

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8. In Meyerhoff: op. cit.

9. Ibid., 193.

the barest of so-called chronicles is more than the sum of facts it relates, for the reader, as he discovers the facts related in the narrative, not only reads his own experience into them but also learns about the experience of the chronicler or historian: the chronicler's experience determined the arrangement of the narrative and led him to impose on that narrative, and through it to convey to the reader, particular attitudes and judgments. Thus, a selection and arrangement of true facts may not simply be unrepresentative but quite false, not because of what is explicitly said (since, elementarily considered, what is said will almost certainly be quite true) but of what is implied. The importance attaching to the representativeness of a historical account was made clear by Lord Macaulay:

> No picture, then, and no history, can present us with the whole truth: but those are the best pictures and the best histories which exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole. He who is deficient in the art of selection may, by showing nothing but the truth, produce all the effect of the grossest falsehood. It perpetually happens that one writer tells less truth than another, merely because he tells more truths.[10]

Professor Nevins has underlined a related feature of history, namely that contradictory historical judgments can be based on exactly the same true facts:

> The Conservative will present an argument, involving a long train of facts, which seems utterly convincing. A moment later, the Liberal will rise, and treating precisely the same facts, present them in an entirely different light which nevertheless also seems momentarily convincing.[11]

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10. "History", in The Varieties of History, ed. Fritz Stern (London, 2nd ed., 1970), 76.

11. Allan Nevins: The gateway to history (Garden City, N.Y., 1962), 224-25.

That is to say, the arguments and interpretations of a historian -- supposedly en rapport with the historical truths cited, and indeed intended to be in some way deduced from them -- can differ markedly from those of a colleague without any dispute about the "facts" as such. The objectivity of facts is independent of the subjectivity manifested in interpretation. This point has important consequences for discussions about the interpretation and understanding of history.[12] For the moment, however, we are confined to a treatment of immediate problems of relativism. It is sufficient to say that even in our everyday experience disagreement with others about a certain occurrence often arises not over the facts of the case but over how those facts are to be interpreted, what is to be made of them, what they "mean"; and, in connection with the more unscrupulous sort of historian, everyday experience tells us too that the best lies can often be told by making a judicious and quite unadulterated selection of perfectly true facts.

Historical statements -- what we think of first when we hear the term "historical facts" -- are the result of a collection and interpretation of simpler facts, which in their own turn must, logically, be considered as interpretations and not as "bare" facts. As Professor Oakeshott has pointed out, the historian

> is represented as starting from a "bare fact", whereas it is safe to say that he never does so, because such

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12. See below, chap. VIII, sect. 9.

> a starting-place is impossible -- he begins with an interpretation, which he reinterprets.[13]

Nevertheless, we can still make a worthwhile distinction between what must be categorized as "interpretations" for the philosopher and what must be considered more practically as "interpretations" for the historian; alternatively, we can say that historians quite validly consider certain statements to be statements about bare facts but regard other statements as being quite properly interpretive statements.

"The Western Roman Empire came to an end in AD 476" is an example of a statement that seems to be about a very simple historical fact; but it is very much a conclusion based on historical judgment and interpretation of events in, and subsequent to, the year 476. It was not a conclusion known to the contemporaries of those events. And the difficulties presented by the concept of "historical truth" may be compounded still further when the historian finds himself obliged to deal with other persons' statements about historical events. These statements are already themselves interpretations of historical facts, for in making a statement, the individual who originally decided to record the events would have chosen certain affirmations about the event rather than others, according to his beliefs and prejudices, his society and culture, and the purpose he may have had in mind at the time he made the statement.

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13. Quoted by Christopher Blake: "Can history be objective?", in Theories of history, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York, 1959), 330-31.

The purpose he had would determine his meaning, and his meaning the character of the supposedly simple historical fact. So it is that two relatively simple statements about the same event may relate the event with equal fullness and equal truth; yet in the way that the statement is made, in the very order of the words in the statement as it stands, the simple fact is indelibly coloured by the historian's own interpretation and evaluation of the event.

The relativist's belief, however, that the historian's judgments, determined as they are by attitudes conditioned both in personal psychological ways and by society, are somehow valid only for a particular society and age (that is, the society and age in which the historian writes), and that they have nothing absolute about them but will be superseded by the judgments of the next generation, leads too easily to the assertion that objective and permanent historical truth is consequently unattainable. It must be made clear, therefore, that the argument claiming that what the historian says is necessarily conditioned by his own position in history does not of itself entail that there can be no such thing as a historical account of enduring value. History is essentially seen with the eyes of the present; it cannot be known absolutely or transcendentally. But what is there that can be? As Mandelbaum observes:

> In the knowing relationship we are always aware that the object-to-be-known transcends that which we know concerning it; we seek to grasp the nature of an object by successively apprehending various of its characteristics.[14]

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14. Op. cit., 84.

To say that history cannot be known absolutely is not to say that our necessarily incomplete and relative knowledge of it is in some way actually incorrect, or invalid, or impermanent; and certainly it is not inferior to other forms of our knowledge about the world. (That the relativist's statement itself, according to the terms of its own argument, may make no claims to be objectively true, proves nothing positive, of course, and so need not be considered in support of objectivity.)

Far from having the dire effects on the absolute integrity of the historian imagined by many of the relativists, historical conditioning may simply cause each generation to see different aspects of past events, or to see past events in different lights. It does not necessarily mean that, considered historically, the same period presents quite different events to each generation, so that each account is consequently in conflict with previous accounts, postulating new historical facts or understanding the same events in an incompatibly different way. 'There will always be a connection between the way in which men contemplate the past,' wrote Buckle, 'and the way in which they contemplate the present.'[15] This is quite true; but the contemplation of the same historical events in different ways and from different points of view, if carried out according to sound principles of historical methodology, should not produce conflicting accounts of those events (although they may produce conflicting evaluative judgments

15. Henry Thomas Buckle: History of Civilization in England (London, 1903), I, 237.

of them) any more than the perception of objects from different viewpoints should result in incompatible descriptions of those objects. Indeed, if a purely pragmatic outlook is taken, reading accounts of historical events from other viewpoints should result for us in a better knowledge of those events, just as a description of a physical object from another perceptual viewpoint (if we understand that viewpoint) gives us a more complete knowledge of that object, and may additionally help us to make corrections to our own account, although, as I shall show later, we do not succeed in creating an objective account in this way, by comparing different accounts from many viewpoints. Of course, to talk like this is, in the end, to indulge in an oversimplification of the problems involved: problems of conditioning regarding a historical viewpoint are vastly more complex than those regarding a perceptual viewpoint, so it will be necessary to consider in detail the various sorts of historical conditioning and various examples of their aspects as they are relevant to problems of relativism.

3. Conditioning as a source of historical values

In the difficulties that are raised, the consideration of several different classes of problems seems to provide support for the person who objects to historical work being centred on the individual historian. One class consists of problems of valuational relativism, or problems

which relate directly to the historian's scheme of values or conditioning.

Conditioning may be either social or psychological, although the latter kind is often given little attention by relativists. Even so, it must be considered, for it can obviously have results for historical work at least as important as those of social conditioning. Personality can turn out to be an important element in a historical narrative, as Elton has recently written, for 'in trying to criticize received narrative histories and their like, the historian must understand both the social conditioning and the personal qualities of the man who produced this evidence for him'.[16] Nevertheless, relativists concentrate their attention on the social conditioning of the historian and do not concern themselves greatly with his psychological conditioning. They seem to hold, more or less implicitly, that serious relativist problems worthy of philosophical consideration arise in society rather than in the individual. Owing to the historian's importance as an individual in historiographical work, I do not believe that the results of psychological conditioning in a historical narrative can be discounted entirely; and although group- or committee-history would solve most overt problems of psychological relativism, relativists do not often come out directly against the individual historian as such. Yet the "academic" position of the historian will be at bottom the result of an interaction, and a continuing one throughout his work, between his individual psychology,

16. Political history: principles and practice (London, 1970), 78.

through his singular personality as intermediary, and the society of which he is part.

The reasons that relativists give so much weight to the social orientation of the historian and so little to his psychological make-up are not immediately clear. One reason may be found, perhaps, in the positive and constructive aspect of the relativist's argument. The relativist is constructive in so far as he says that written history is relative to the historian's time and place, but that, all the same, the historian, holding this fact always in mind as one of his basic principles, must carry on with his work; the historian's work, many relativists claim, will be the better for his recognition of the limits of its validity and significance. Social relativism, it appears, can lead to a positive and constructive historical outlook. Psychological relativism, obviously, could not lead us to formulate any cogent positive argument, for in the end it must lead to the conclusion that any supposedly objective body of thought will in reality be nothing more than a worthless intellectual chaos, manifesting a pervasive historical solipsism.

Another reason, however, may be found in the general dislike for arguments about psychological features of an individual with regard to his intellectual work. It is clear that in our own society (although by no means is this true of all societies present and past) there is a certain distaste for bringing some kinds of psychological questions about an individual into intellectual discussions,

as if psychological factors in the genesis of an intellectual position could be discounted, and arguments based on a consideration of those factors (or even simply including them as points to be examined), might be deemed of no account and perhaps quite disreputable. It is an attitude that may be connected with the widespread feeling that personalities should not be brought into intellectual arguments. Nevertheless, it is to be maintained that if those arguments which are based on the social grounds of an intellectual position are in order, so are those arguments which are based on a consideration of its psychological grounds. It seems in any case an arbitrary and even absurd intellectual limitation to say that ideas should be examined in their own right, without reference to any extraneous factors that may have had some direct bearing on the formulation of the argument behind them. And it is still more arbitrary for the effect of some of these factors (the social ones) to be considered, while the effect of others (the psychological ones) is ignored: the effects may be substantially similar and may well have an equivalent significance. A psychoanalytic examination of an ostensibly intellectual argument may provide us, if not with a sufficient basis for the rejection of the argument, then at least with very strong support for an opposing position. The apparently irrational aspects of man cannot be ignored even when fully rational aspects are being examined. To make a separation of the rational and the irrational in any discussion of man is to create an

abstraction, which, however fine it may be as a pure construction for intellectual discussion, will fail to be directly applicable to the case where the real problem is found; the rational and the irrational, reason and rationalization, can prove to be inseparable in the loftiest thought. In the end, the implicit foundations underlying the social determination of an intellectual position may be as irrational as those which underlie its psychological determination. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that as the origin of an intellectual position has a basis in both psychological and social factors, so too its acceptability to any individual will be psychologically, as well as socially, conditioned.

In their allowance and use of arguments based on social conditioning while they ignore or reject arguments based on psychological conditioning, the relativists make the implied assumption that value-judgments and whatever effect they may have on objectivity can be overcome. In effect, they contribute to the refutation of their own position. Relativists agree that there can be a (comparative) objectivity within a society -- an intersubjective agreement not simply about facts but about values as well -- despite the evident fact that different individuals have different values, make use of these values in, among other things, accounts of fact or involving facts, and may well, because of this, be misunderstood or may, if they are historians, lead their readers into error. Yet, since relativists do not wish to be solipsists, they do

not argue that problems arising in this connection cannot be solved; they would agree that in one way or another, one should be able to compensate for individual judgments and understand for oneself what sort of account might be "objective" for any particular society.[17] Within any one society we can understand other individuals simply because they are not irremediably cut off from us as a solipsist might hold. Nevertheless, relativists, while they would probably dismiss individual solipsism, embrace what might well be called a type of societal solipsism. Thus we cannot know what "supra-social" objective truth might be -- the argument might run -- because we always see history with the values of a particular society. And the idea has been put forward that knowledge (as such) is itself socially determined and orientated, and, more, that this represents the final position of human knowledge, that societies (in a stricter sense than I am generally using the term in in this chapter) provide the setting or context of knowledge. Professor Walsh observes that

> once we move outside the sphere of necessary truth, no contradiction will be involved in rejecting any given set of standards; there will be nothing internally to commend any one consistent set against any other. In determining what is correct here we accordingly have no alternative but to consider what standards are in fact

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17. It is to be understood that "society" is a very loose term in this context. It can be taken with its literal sociological meaning; but it can also be understood to refer to any group sharing common social values and a distinctive world-outlook. Since in any group only some values are relevant socially, psychological differences that could lead to differences in values relevant socially in other groups can be ignored. "Society" here, therefore, could be, for example, Western, Islamic, Marxist-Leninist, or Protestant.

applied by those who work or have worked in the area concerned. The sharp contrast between what is acceptable and what is accepted loses its force in these circumstances, for in deciding what to accept we necessarily have an eye to what is in practice accepted.[18]

If knowledge is only truly to be accounted knowledge (or to be defined as knowledge) through its social context, then, specifically, our knowledge of the values of other societies is similarly to find its essence and justification through our own social setting and thus through our own values. In one way or another the values of other societies must be seen in terms of our own. It must follow that any work of compensation for the bias to be found in different accounts cannot even be begun; for we can never find out quite what the "real" point of view of another society is. The relativists' solipsism would hold that one society is irremediably cut off from another; other societies are for us interpretable only in terms of our own society, and not in their own terms, or in neutral or objective terms (except in so far as "objective" is taken to mean "objective within a society's accepted body of knowledge").[19] However, to view societies in this fashion is patently anti-historical, for it is to see societies ultimately as quite separate and discrete. Yet, with a few exceptions, all human societies have a record of contacts

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18. "Knowledge in its social setting", Mind, 80 (1971), 336.

19. The existence of different points of view contemporaneously in the same society, as, for example, with Catholics and Protestants, is no argument against the relativist's position. The relativist could hold that mutual understanding might be reached on a different level, that is, in a higher, common scheme of values, in this case the Christian.

with other societies, involving influences, overlaps, and exchanges. Where societies have been in close contact, one society has frequently dominated the other; as time has passed and conditions have changed, one society has frequently been transformed into another. Societies do not change in discrete jumps; they are not distinguishable by means of a sharply defined border. Through historical understanding we shall find that other societies share some of our values, and this will provide us with, so to speak, a "way in" to those societies and to an understanding of the way in which they saw, or still see, the world. As we succeed in compensating for differences in values between individuals and come to understand what is an "objective" account within a society, so, with a sufficient but not unattainable comprehension, we most certainly can set out to achieve, having come to grasp its nature, at least a partial balance of the differences between societies, and formulate an account which, although not quite an "objective" account for humanity, has taken notice of the many ways in which the same events can be interpreted by humanity. In any case, to strive for an objectivity beyond this would be pointless, for history takes its references from the human world and not from a world of objects.

What I hope to show, therefore, is that social relativism and psychological relativism must be accepted or rejected together: either the relativist must be ready to admit the total collapse for history of any hopes in

respect of substantial non-subjective validity, not only absolutely for all time, but also even within one particular society, and to agree too that in history nothing can count for truth; or he must reject the conclusions of his relativistic arguments, in so far as they deny a validity that can claim to be unrestrictedly absolute, the conclusions both of those arguments with a psychological reference and of those with a social reference, and accept that historical truth can be known through the historian's valuational judgments and his value-conditioned judgments.

Social relativism and some of its attendant problems will be considered first. The relativist's common objections in this connection have as their basis the point that each age and each society see history in their own ways. It is to be emphasized here that I am not talking about the more or less conscious surface preconceptions that enter into our judgments -- I shall refer to these later -- but rather to the actual deep-rooted basis of our outlook on the world -- to that kind of gulf which, for example, at its most extreme separates the way we organize our knowledge in twentieth-century English culture from the way in which, say, Bede or Alcuin looked at the world twelve hundred years ago. Such a gulf is not created by the sort of preconceptions which a historian can come close to eliminating by conscientious attention to the way in which he is expressing himself; it has its origins at the very core of the society in which a historian lives. Indeed, one cannot even begin to conceive how historians

might set out to resolve such a truly cosmic disagreement. The problems found in the differing conceptions that can underlie history can be illustrated by the example of "historical truth". The problem of "truth" and its meaning for the historians of antiquity is sometimes disposed of by classifying the classical conception of truth in history as "bad" or "faulty". This is unfair, for the classical historians were not, for the most part, working to the same ideal of history as we possess. Thucydides was the only historian to have our ideal of factual truth; and even he felt free to invent speeches that could not possibly have been made, and which sometimes may not even have been typical of the person to whom they are attributed. Later classical historians knew both of Thucydides and of his ideal of factual truth in history, but chose not to attempt a realization of that ideal in their historical writing. The question to be asked about classical and medieval writers of purportedly historical accounts is not why they failed to conceive of factual truth in history, but why, having such a concept, for the purposes of writing history they chose to disregard it in favour of a different concept of truth.

That our judgments about history, that our assessment of importance or lack of importance regarding different events or personages in history, are relative to the society that has conditioned us, is not to be disputed. What is to be decided is whether such relativism actually impairs history so severely that we are compelled to accept

the sceptic's position. We may find the answer to this problem in the work of Karl Mannheim. Without agreeing with the general context of the following passage or with many of the wide-ranging and significant conclusions to which this position of Mannheim's partly contributes, the point made here provides the key to an understanding of what relativism proper really entails. Mannheim distinguishes between two separate solutions to 'the problem of what constitutes reliable knowledge', the one is 'relationism', the other 'relativism'.

> Relativism is a product of the modern historical-sociological procedure which is based on the recognition that all historical thinking is bound up with the concrete position in life of the thinker. ... This older type of thought [sc. relativism], which regarded such examples as the model of all thought, was necessarily led to the rejection of all those forms of knowledge which were dependent upon the subjective standpoint and the social situation of the knower, and which were, hence, merely "relative". ...
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> ... Actually, epistemology is as intimately enmeshed in the social process as is the totality of our thinking, and it will make progress to the extent that it can master the complications arising out of the changing structure of thought.
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> A modern theory of knowledge which takes account of the relational as distinct from the merely relative character of all historical knowledge must start with the assumption that there are spheres of thought in which it is impossible to conceive of absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the subject and unrelated to the social context. Even a god could not formulate a proposition on historical subjects like $2 \times 2 = 4$, for what is intelligible in history can be formulated only with reference to problems and conceptual constructions which themselves arise in the flux of historical experience.[20]

Once it is clear that we cannot formulate historical statements, or indeed any statement with a historical content, which do not have a relational nature, we see that

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20. Karl Mannheim: Ideology and Utopia (London, 1960), 70-71.

what the opponents of relativism are in some cases looking for is something that is, through our human nature, inconceivable. Historical judgments by definition (in their very nature) cannot be objective in such a way: it is therefore pointless to talk as if they could be. Historical objectivity is something other than any notional objectivity of judgment. Even the simplest accounts contain words, phrases, and statements which already contain presuppositions fundamental to a human society and an intellectual position within that society, and which are, because of that, unequivocally relative.[21] Even so, what has already been said with reference to the social context of knowledge is not to be forgotten. That we see things from our own particular viewpoint does not mean that we cannot fully and fairly understand other societies. The presuppositions of our knowledge do not mean that we are cut off from other societies. Accepting our own presuppositions does not entail that we cannot understand the presuppositions of others.

Sometimes it may happen, when it is believed that objectivity can only be attained through the exclusion of values, that one is asked whether "objectivity" implies that one should talk of, say, Hitler's concentration camps in words that do not automatically and unambiguously condemn them.[22] That the idea of using neutral language in

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21. I do not continue to make the distinction between "relativism" and "relationism" with those expressions, as they are not terms widely found in other writers.

22. I must stress that I am not referring to explicit moral judgments here, but rather to the general (relative)

such an instance should be quite abhorrent goes to show precisely how deep the ostensible values of our social upbringing go; the fact that we can consider the idea of a neutral, or even favourable, account of such matters, which would state the physical truth with equal correctness, shows that our position is a purely relative one.

4. Implicit and explicit value-judgments

The solution to the problem of the judgments that are implicit in the language the historian uses and their significance for objectivity is largely a straightforward one. As I shall show below, moral judgments do not form part of historical truth: they have no purportedly factual content to be criticized. Corresponding judgments which are implicit in the historian's language are not themselves factual either. They form an emotional (valuational) charge on the factual part of the concepts the historian uses. The factual part is that part which can be true or false and which may lay claim to objectivity. That part of the concept which is strictly a "valuational charge" on it cannot of itself be true or false (although it may be true or false through its dependence on certain facts) and cannot therefore claim objectivity. Values cannot and do not seek to be objective: they have their

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"philosophy of life" that is implicit in any account. The term "concentration camp" itself has already developed as a sign or symptom of bias. The problem here quickly identifies itself with the problem of the historian's language, which is discussed later.

origin and their continued existence in an individual or in a society.

An extended example may be in order here to illustrate what I am trying to say. "Usurp" is a word that bears a strong valuational charge. To put the judgment, implicit in the word, in an explicit way, we might change a statement like "The generals usurped power" into "The generals seized power illegitimately". There need be no disagreement over the facts which lead to the description of such-and-such a set of acts as a usurpation of power. Obviously, the description of an act as a "usurpation" may indeed be false because the historian has the facts wrong. If he agrees with the facts as corrected, he will undoubtedly withdraw the word "usurpation". But, if it is granted that statements of fact are correct, a historian might say that "usurpation" was a correct description of what happened because the effective acts were illegitimate, whereas a second historian might say that the generals -- it is true -- committed these acts, but that these acts were not illegitimate, either directly because due legal steps were taken to legitimize them, or, more controversially, because the acts were justified, in international law, perhaps, or in terms of "higher" principles, or as a consequence of the anarchic state of the country. Therefore, the second historian might conclude, what the generals did in no way amounted to a usurpation and hence was not illegitimate. Now, to describe acts as illegitimate is dependent either on a judgment of the historian, and

consequently -- usually -- of his society, or on a judgment of the society in which the acts took place, that is to say, they are illegitimate according to the laws of that society. Most people would readily agree that the first sort of judgment, by the present historian or society, is a value-judgment relative to present ideas and attitudes. The most obvious exceptions here are those persons who make historical judgments in the light of their religious, or quasi-religious, beliefs, and who would therefore claim that their judgments are timeless and objective. The second sort of judgment, on the other hand, arguably makes a factual claim. This, nevertheless, is not the case: actions perfectly legitimate within a society may later be held to be illegitimate; and of course, actually illegitimate acts are often legitimized at a later time within the same society; clearly this provides an additional example of a relative value-judgment within a society. In consequence, we may say that the historian's judgment need not correspond either to the judgments of his own society or to those of the society about which he happens to be writing: there can be no established "objective norm" for a historian's behaviour in this regard.

Of course, if it is made clear that "illegitimate" as used in an account is to be understood to mean something like "illegitimate according to the laws of the society under study" then "usurp" in this context will be an entirely factual word with a reference internal to the

account, and involving no judgment on the historian's part. The historian must make it apparent that he is claiming to do no more than this: he should, if he asserts a factual use of "usurp", make statements of the form, for example: "Constitutionally the generals' actions were a usurpation of power."

A similar sort of criticism, parallel to the criticism of implicit judgments, can be made about explicit valuational judgments, since these differ only in their explicitness from those judgments that are implicit in a word through the "charge" it bears. (Or rather, one should say, perhaps, that the historian's attitude becomes an overt one in explicit judgments.) To judge an action morally as wicked, for instance, has no intrinsic factual relevance and does not of itself and necessarily determine the truth of a historical narrative. Thus, in principle, an individual historian may make all the moral judgments he wishes, so long as any attempt to put forward a moral judgment in respect of his subject as a whole (as, say, that King John was a wicked ruler) does not lead him to tamper with the facts, treating scurrilous rumours as statements of hard fact and suppressing any well-established facts that might encourage us to view his subject more tolerantly.[23]

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23. As examples of valuational judgments I shall be usually making reference to moral judgments. These are the judgments that are typically present in written history. The historian may well make other sorts of valuation (e.g., aesthetic), but these are comparatively rare. In any case, similar arguments apply with regard to all types of valuational judgments.

The results of social conditioning, in the presence of relative judgments, are to be found in every historical account. They cannot be eliminated, simply for the reason that so much of our language -- and particularly that part of it which relates to human actions, the first subject-matter of history -- consists of words which, while having a central core of factual reference, bear a positive or negative valuational charge.[24] Indeed, although it has no factual significance, the presence of such valuational language is ineliminable from narrative history whether it is found there implicitly or explicitly, as I intend to demonstrate later.[25] More, it is, as I shall argue, central to a genuine understanding of the historical past.

The presence of psychologically conditioned judgments, more immediately relative to the individual rather than to the historian's society, is also essential to history; this will be seen to be especially the case when the individuality of a single historian is understood as essential to narrative history. There is, however, an important difference to be observed between social and psychological conditioning.

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24. The problem to which I am referring here is of course a well-known and basic one in the field of ethics. By some writers, such as Charles L. Stevenson in Ethics and language it is treated under the heading of "persuasive definitions"; by others, notably R. M. Hare in The language of morals and Freedom and reason, it is discussed as the problem of "prescriptive meaning". I look at the problem more fully later, in section 6.

25. See below, sects. 6 and 8, and chap. VIII, sect. 8.

The results of the social conditioning of the historian, if he is part of the same society as his reader, will be something that any educated reader can always understand. We may say that the values of the historian and the reader are in alignment. This is what makes the judgments to be found in the history of contemporary writers in a certain way uninjurious. Where the attentive reader is not conscious of the historian's socially conditioned assumptions, it is because they form an integrated part of his own assumptions; in so far as this takes place, at least, the reader's understanding can be taken to be integrated with the historian's understanding. Where the reader is conscious of the historian's valuational judgments, he will come to understand them, and then he will either agree or disagree with them or simply accept them, which implies that he must find them in accord with his own point of view in other matters.

Unfortunately, where the historian is not one with the reader in period and society, where the historian's values and those of the reader are not in alignment, difficulties must occur: the reader, in encountering evidence of a certain valuation, by the historian of another age or society, of individuals, or events, or institutions, may completely fail to understand that valuation; or, worse, he may misunderstand it, much as we may frequently misunderstand the Greek concept of "ἀρετή" or the Renascence concept of "vertù". Now, the same sort of misunderstanding can also take place about those judgments that

are psychologically conditioned in the case of a reader and a contemporary historian. Such judgments may be understood in their social way when a peculiar individual understanding is necessary, or the reader may just fail to comprehend what it is that the historian is trying to say about the subject of his narrative.

It must be stressed that while we are thinking about the problems raised for history by values and value-judgments, we must continually bear in mind that the valuational judgments in question do not of themselves endanger necessarily the factual correctness and truth of historical accounts. Such judgments do not intrinsically bring objectivity into question, for there cannot be anything objective about them in the sense of factual objectivity. How we judge a historical event or personage is not a factual matter: it is not, that is to say, something that is open to justification through objective considerations rather than subjective attitudes.

Valuational judgments do not necessarily affect the factual truth of an account; but of course they can in practice seriously distort fact. Our own moral attitudes may distort our knowledge of the past: as we read a work of history we may unconsciously not take in some fact that does not fit in with our own preconceptions and presumptions, or we may unconsciously belittle important facts, aggrandize unimportant individuals, seeing them, perhaps, with a part in affairs which was not in actuality theirs, postulate for ourselves facts for which there is no

objective evidence but which provide, in our terms, a satisfactory explanation for some event, or bring together in an unlikely but satisfactory relationship different and remote events. Just as the reader of the narrative can do this as he reads, so the historian can do the same sort of thing as he writes the narrative. Now, when the reader is not aware of the valuational bias of the historian or when that valuational bias is not in accord with his own (or when it is opposed to his, but not opposed in terms that he understands through the society in which he lives[26]), he may very well be found to be taking in facts that are distorted through his unawareness, without either correcting or disputing them.

The historian's valuation is not necessarily significant with respect to the factual truth of his statements. In practice, however, valuation must almost inevitably affect the facts of the past as they are recounted in history, so that accounts of one event by different persons

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26. Two persons' opinions may be opposed, but in agreed terms: bias of this nature will not be hazardous. For example, there is much talk at present of "our democratic way of life". However much we may feel uneasy that the modern concept of "democracy" has a connection with the original concept that is becoming ever more tenuous and vague while the high value associated with that original concept is retained so that people are induced to value greatly our present political set-up, we do nevertheless understand what the use of the word is meant to denote. Thus we shall be misled to no greater extent by the arguments of Labour politicians than by those of Conservative politicians, by the arguments of the supporters of democracy than by those of its opponents; for all these people will be arguing about democracy in the same terms. However, we may be seriously misled by a writer who, in the context of the twentieth century, uses the word "democracy" with its authentic and original meaning without actually specifying carefully that he is doing so.

vary in factual detail (without contradicting each other) and in interpretational conclusions. Is valuation, then, truly an essential part of history, something that is essential to the narrative, something that must -- in reality -- significantly affect the historian's facts? Or, in order to prevent as far as possible even the slightest distortion of facts, should we strive to exclude valuation from history altogether?

It is definitely the case that there are many points in their common subject-matter on which all historians agree. Yet all historical accounts differ in the way the facts are presented; and the differences between various accounts are greater when the accounts originate in different cultures, different periods, or different ideologies. Valuation of itself does not change facts; nor does it necessarily affect the truth and validity of a historical narrative. However, if valuation of a moral, cultural, aesthetic, or similar kind is seen as essential to a historical narrative and, even more strongly, as part of the very core of history, somewhere at some time readers will be led into error about historical fact, not necessarily because of a lack of objectivity on the part of the individual historian but because of a lack of objectivity on their own part. How, then, are moral judgments a historian's business?

The moral position of the historian can be shown to be logically a gloss on historical fact and not an integral part of it. But what is the real position of valuational

judgments in historical work? Many historians and philosophers see moral judgments (and, mutatis mutandis, what is said about moral judgments can be applied to related sorts of valuation) as a very central part of the historian's task. Indeed, a moral position is so central a part of written history for some thinkers that objectivity in history must rest in the end on the attainment of a final, universally accepted moral position; Professor Walsh, for example, suggests that the final (and only) solution to the problem of historical objectivity is 'the ultimate attainment of a single historical point of view, a statement of presuppositions which all historians must be prepared to accept'.[27] But this, as Professor Walsh himself points out, would have ramifications far beyond the confines of historical theory narrowly considered, and would require not only a straightening-out of the historian's factual knowledge but also a standardization of our moral and metaphysical ideas. Many relativists too point out that objectivity in history would require an agreement on common interpretational standards among historians.

As a corollary of the central place of moral judgments in history Professor Walsh indicates that the historian needs final knowledge of how people ought to behave as well as knowledge of how they in fact do behave. For objectivity in history, the argument runs, there must be an absolute standard of morality; and yet it is difficult to understand how a set of moral standards could ever be

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27. Philosophy of history: an introduction (New York, 1960), 118.

shown to be absolute and final, let alone objectively grounded. If there can be such a concept as moral objectivity, and if moral judgments are admitted as a primary and somehow factual part of the historian's task, it will be a necessary consequence that an account cannot be objective unless the elusive moral standards have been found. The possibility of a final moral standard is a questionable one, and in any case properly the province of ethical studies. The far-reaching consequences of a programme of standardization not only for ethics but for our world-view itself suggest that it could prove more immediately productive to approach the problem of historical objectivity in another way. It would be better, therefore, to discuss the role of morals in history in a way that is not affected by a problem which is really one of the basic problems of philosophical ethics. Consequently, in the next two sections I shall look at valuational judgments in history with reference only to our present situation where differing moral standards are apparently in competition with one another.

5. Explicit moral judgments

Historians make moral judgments; and in some form moral judgments do have a place in narrative history. They do not, however, have an inherent factual relevance and so we do not find, with regard to overtly made judgments, that objectivity is placed in question. Explicitly

divorced as they are from factual statements, they do not lead to factual confusion and distortion. When it is understood that moral judgments are not directly part of history as such, that they are not actually part of the "material" of history, then a good number of relativist problems in history will be avoided.

It is important to establish and clarify the place of overt moral judgments in history, and it is therefore necessary to mention here arguments for and against overt judgments by the historian. A strong case can be made for the assertion that in his account the historian should make moral judgments in their own right: a statement in support of the central role of valuational judgments in history is made by Sir Isaiah Berlin (among others).

> We are told that it is foolish to judge Charlemagne or Napoleon, or Genghis Khan or Hitler or Stalin for their massacres. For that is at most a comment upon ourselves and not upon "the facts". Likewise we are told that it is absurd to praise those benefactors of humanity whom the followers of Comte so faithfully celebrated, or at least that to do so is not our business as historians: because as historians our categories are neutral and differ from our categories as ordinary human beings as those of chemists undeniably do. ... We are further told that we should practise such objectivity out of respect for some imaginary scientific canon which distinguishes between facts and values very sharply, so sharply that it enables us to regard the former as being objective, "inexorable" and therefore self-justifying, and the latter merely as a subjective gloss upon events -- due to the moment, the milieu, the individual temperament -- and consequently unworthy of serious scholarship, of the great hard edifice of dispassionate historical construction. To this we can only answer that to accept this doctrine is to do violence to the basic notions of our morality, to misrepresent our sense of our past, and to ignore the most general concepts and categories of normal thought.[28]

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28. Historical inevitability (London, 1954), 77.

It is simply not the case, however, that if a historian refrains from making a moral judgment, our ideas of morality are shocked, or that, when we look at a sample of actual neutral history, we necessarily feel that we should be. Neutrality (without the note of disapproval which is sometimes carried by that word) is a feature of much historical writing. Here is one example of a scene which must clearly horrify the reader, described by a historian quite evenly and with an almost complete detachment in regard to explicit or implicit moral judgments; but no violence is done by this attitude to our moral sensibilities.

> Stephen's vengeance -- directed by Spoleto -- turned on the memory, reputation and remains of Formosus and on his followers. In February or March 897 a synod was assembled in the presence of the Emperor Lambert and his mother. The tomb of Formosus was broken open and his corpse, dressed in full pontificals, was placed in a chair as defendant before the synod; a deacon stood by as his advocate. The grisly scene was fully played out. Pope Stephen shrieked his accusations at the corpse -- of usurping as Bishop of Porto the papal throne, of his enmity against John VIII, of his ambition and of his re-entry into Rome while the ban still ran against him. The wretched deacon offered no defence for his principal and Formosus was condemned. Three fingers of his right hand, the hand of benediction, were cut off, his vestments stripped from him, and his corpse thrown into the river.[29]

The historian need make no moral judgments: the factual account as it stands is sufficient for the reader to form his own judgments. Indeed, if the historian is confident of his own moral values, he should feel that a clear, factual account will be sufficient to awaken the reader's own moral susceptibilities, unless, as may indeed be the

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29. Peter Llewellyn: Rome in the Dark Ages (London, 1971), 292.

case, he is ready to suspect in his readers the presence of a certain moral lethargy.

Berlin's line of thought, as E. H. Carr points out, makes the historian a kind of hanging judge. Quite obviously Berlin is presenting us with a most extreme version of the case for moral judgments in history. He does not seem to allow that one can reject a full conjunction of facts and values without thereby endorsing their complete separation. But no more should be said for the moment than that a moral judgment about a particular historical fact is not a part of factual history -- that is to say, it does not belong to that part of history for which there is the possibility of objectivity.

Carr observes quite openly that the historian is not concerned with the everyday sort of moral judgment, that, say, Henry VIII was a bad husband. But he may be concerned to pass a more general judgment on particular actions and events as they fit into the whole of his historical narrative. In other words, Carr maintains that it is no business of the historian to denounce individuals, while he goes on to say that the historian should consider it part of his task to pronounce judgments about the events, policies and institutions that are to be found in history.

> Max Weber refers to "the masterless slavery in which capitalism enmeshes the worker or the debtor", and rightly argues that the historian should pass moral judgments on the institutions, but not on the individuals who created it. The historian does not stand in judgment on an individual oriental despot. But he is not required to remain indifferent and impartial between, say, oriental despotism and the institutions of Periclean Athens. He will not pass judgment on the individual slave-owner.

But this does not prevent him from condemning a slave-owning society.[30]

Logically, Carr's position is untenable. It could be true that history proper was not concerned with individuals as such, so that moral judgments about individuals were not so much out of order as an irrelevant diversion. Yet, for Carr -- and with this I agree -- it is the historian's task to write about individuals as well as institutions. If history is centrally concerned with individuals, to allow the possibility of moral judgments on institutions while not allowing their possibility with regard to individuals -- for, as historical particulars, individuals and institutions have the same logical status -- seems to require adjudication of an arbitrary nature. If moral judgments are allowed in history, it can only be as wrong to pass judgment on Henry VIII's private life as it is to go into unnecessarily detailed and historically irrelevant descriptions of that private life.[31] Histories about individuals, that is, biographies, must surely even on Carr's principles admit moral judgments about individuals. It must be the case that if we can make moral judgments about institutions and so on, then, where they are appropriate, we can make moral judgments about individuals. In any case, even if Carr should be advocating a relatively narrow conception of history, excluding biographies and biographical tendencies in history proper, to pass judgment

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30. What is history? (Harmondsworth, 1964), 78-79.

31. Historical "irrelevance", of course, is determined by context, not by any intrinsic property of the "facts" themselves.

on an institution is inevitably to pass judgment by implication on the individuals who created it, and on those who willingly and knowingly took part in its activities or acceded to its consequences. If there is no judgment on individuals implied in such a case, then as a moral judgment it is meaningless. It must be said that in condemning a slave-owning society the historian is not condemning every individual slave-owner, but he is surely condemning most slave-owners, or slave-owners in general.

To advocate the suppression of moral judgments in historical work need not be considered unmoral. Sir Herbert Butterfield, who believes that 'life is a moral matter every inch of the way' (although if we read his remark au pied de la lettre it is hard to understand how that part of life which is the study of history can be excluded from the moral life), is yet prepared to assert that in history

> moral judgments on human beings are by their nature irrelevant to the enquiry and alien to the intellectual realm of scientific history. ... [T]hese moral judgments must be recognized to be an actual hindrance to enquiry and reconstruction; they are in fact the principal reason why investigation is so often brought to a premature halt.[32]

Butterfield presents, indeed, a good summary of the case that can be made against the making of moral judgments in history altogether:

> [T]he historian who leaves the realm of explanation and description, and moves into the world of moral judgments, is in reality trying to take upon himself (and to claim for his intellectual system) a new dimension. Very quickly this has its effect on the

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32. "Moral judgments in history", in Meyerhoff: op. cit., 230.

> whole shape and setting which he gives to the course of things in time, and on his whole conception of the drama of human life in history. The morality comes to be worked into the organisation of the narrative and the structure of the historical scene in a manner that is illegitimate. ... [T]he whole historical fabric, at whatever point we choose to observe it, is shot through with the colourful contrast of divine right and diabolical wrong. It transpires that the fabric is in truth like a piece of shot silk, for the colour of its parts seems to depend very largely on the way the observer looks at them after all.[33]

However, despite Butterfield's arguments, there is no need to exclude explicit moral judgments from a historical narrative. Many historians do in fact make such judgments. What must be borne in mind is that the moral judgments in a narrative are not intrinsically historical in themselves -- they do not constitute knowledge of the past, although they may contribute to an understanding of the past -- and their presence in written history does not make them historical, or factual, or possibly objective. So long as valuational judgments are explicit, and so long as the historian does not select his facts in order to depict a past that is in conformity with his judgments, but rather remembers to treat the establishment of historical facts as if that were an end in itself, judging the past -- institutions or individuals -- will not damage the factual truthfulness of an account. There is no problem for the reader of history if one historian of a certain subject should say that action A was bad, while the second historian (of the same subject) bluntly asserts the contrary, that action A was good; what matters for history is that they both agree that action A happened, and happened

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33. Ibid., 247.

in a certain way, at a certain time, in a certain place. That action A happened is the historical statement. Since there is always a risk that moral judgments, and other types of valuational judgments, will lead to the distortion or suppression of historical facts by the historian, and thus to a loss of objectivity, it would not be unnatural for some historians to wish altogether to avoid making explicit judgments.

6. Implicit valuational language

Whether they are socially or psychologically conditioned, explicit valuational judgments, just because of their explicitness, need present no great problems for objectivity in history. Implicit judgments, on the other hand, cannot be removed from history, for they are completely bound into the language we use when we talk about man in society. This was clear to Aristotle when he pointed out that

> not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g., spite, shamelessness, envy, and in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they are themselves bad, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong.[34]

And a most recent writer has looked at this problem in its directly historiographical connections, observing:

> Even very ordinary words over which there has been less heat than with "liberal" or "tribal", can insinuate

34. The Nicomachean ethics, trans. Sir David Ross (London, 1954), 39 (1107a10).

> a moral tone though they may be correct descriptions of events: "devious negotiations", "sinister moves", "tolerant policy" or "wise statesmanship". In the description of character or group actions imputations of "irresponsibility", "fanaticism", "prejudice", "justice", "honesty", "wisdom" or "enterprise", easily suggest moral judgments. Such a list can be extended almost indefinitely, showing words containing moral evaluations, as well as being descriptive.[35]

Such value-charged words are, however, indispensable to the true description of human actions. Carefully selected, neutral and perhaps behavioural language ceases to characterize actions as specifically human. Our concepts about human social behaviour (carrying various valuational charges) cannot be changed to colder, more neutral, "scientific" forms. Value-charged language is very much a part of that historical "understanding" which figures largely in a full account of historical explanation.[36]

The citation of some examples of passages where valuational judgments are implicit in the language of the writer would be helpful here. The following three extracts are typical of the sort of writing that is often encountered in finished narrative history. I have given a few comments on each passage.

> Enough has been said to indicate that the presence of President Wilson in Paris was a serious misfortune. It remains to consider how that misfortune arose. It is no sufficient explanation to attribute to President Wilson defects of character which precluded him from viewing his own personality from a detached angle.

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35. Ann Low-Beer: "Moral judgments in history and history teaching", in Studies in the nature and teaching of history, ed. W. H. Burston and D. Thompson (London, 1967), 141.

36. How "charged" language cannot be eliminated from those narratives where it occurs, and what part it plays in historical understanding are subjects treated in the chapters on explanation and understanding.

> His decision was not unwise merely: it was also deliberate; it was even obstinate. From a Constitutional point of view the presence in Paris of the President unaccompanied by a Committee duly appointed by the Senate was at least open to question. Mr. Lansing and Colonel House have both revealed with what grave preoccupation they regarded this decision. The latter attributes the determination of the President to a conviction on his part that he was the appointed mediator between man and man.[37]

Nicolson's language is heavily value-charged. The expression "a serious misfortune" has explanatory intent: yet a more neutral statement that Wilson's presence had, say, "important adverse consequences" would have served, objectively speaking, equally well. "Defects of character" is an expression that is a value-charged equivalent of a word like "traits" with some additional connotations. That these defects precluded Wilson from viewing his own personality from a detached angle is both a (possibly) true factual description of the President's psychology as well as (given the way most twentieth-century Western people look at these matters) an unfavourable judgment about the President. "Unwise" is an explicit judgment; "deliberate" is neutral; but "obstinate" is a very good example of a word with both a factual, descriptive function and a high value-content. Instead of "obstinate" the same factual signification could have been found in the more or less

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37. Harold Nicolson: Peacemaking 1919 (London, 1964), 73. One possible objection to this passage needs to be disposed of: and that is, that Nicolson's book is not so much "history" as "memoirs". This could only be a complaint on purely technical grounds. Although this passage is by an individual who actually took part in events (which is sometimes regarded almost as a disqualification for the modern historian, regardless of praise for Thucydides), the events connected with the Paris Peace Conference are treated seriously, deeply, and "historically". The passage quoted must therefore be undisputedly considered a passage of history.

neutral "determined" or "strong-willed", in the mildly approving "resolute", or the very favourable "steadfast" or "unfaltering".[38] The view that Nicolson himself has taken of Wilson's presence in Paris is then justified by a statement of the doubtful constitutional legitimacy of Wilson's action of coming to Paris and a description of the attitudes of two senior Americans. The whole passage is both almost entirely factual and, in valuational terms, heavily weighted.

In the following extract the tone is set not by judgments of a moral order but by implicit valuation of a different sort.

> Most attacks upon the settlement [of the Paris peace conference of 1919] during the following twenty years arose from the disparity between the excessively high hopes that men had pinned upon it and its tangle of uninspiring compromises. Yet these compromises inevitably arose in any attempt to apply rational or moral principles to the fragmented territories of Europe. Justice in such matters could never be other than relative: yet the mood of men was perfectionist. Considering the passions aroused by more than four years of war, the intractability of the problems themselves, and the unknown aftermath looming ahead, the makers of the settlement achieved more than should have seemed probable when they first met.[39]

The language of this passage still conveys approval and disapproval -- even if it does not have a moral basis --

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38. Other words may vary between being favourable, unfavourable, or neutral according to the valuation which inheres in their context. "Unyielding" is an example of such a word. But the position is further complicated by the fact that "unyielding" in the context of a passage like the one above could well be disapproving while at the same time the use of the word could suggest that the general quality behind the one instance of misguided behaviour was on the whole to be approved.

39. David Thomson: World history from 1914 to 1950 (London, 1954), 83.

in terms of what was and what was not reasonable, of what might be and what might not be fairly expected. To speak of "excessively" high hopes "pinned upon" the settlement is to suggest expectations that had not been deeply thought about and perhaps should have been. A "tangle" of uninspiring compromises is a phrase that conveys a low opinion on the part of the historian of the results of the negotiations. "Fragmented" is not a word that every historian would use to describe the new states that were created according to the principle (supposedly) of national self-determination. And Thomson's statement about justice is very much a judgment of a valuational type.

Although professional historians might claim that it is completely unrepresentative of "true" history and especially of modern historical work, the following extract is typical of much of the history, albeit often in a more up-to-date form, with which laymen come into contact.

> As the happiness of a <u>future</u> life is the great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister: a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the specious demands of charity and devotion; and the soldiers' pay was lavished on the useless multitudes of both sexes who could only plead the merits of abstinence and chastity. Faith, zeal, curiosity, and more earthly passions of malice and ambition, kindled the flame of theological discord; the church, and even the state, were distracted by religious factions, whose conflicts were sometimes bloody and always implacable; the attention of the emperors was diverted from camps to synods; the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny; and

the persecuted sects became the secret enemies of their country.[40]

A passage like this needs no comments to indicate its value-charged language. Gibbon, however, provides us with a good illustration of how facts and values may be regarded separately; and it is also a good example of how an excessive intrusion of valuational judgments may come close to distorting the truth. What can Gibbon mean, for instance, when he says above that 'the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister'? It is undoubtedly a distortion to say that 'the attention of the emperors was diverted from camps to synods', if by this Gibbon really means to claim that they forgot about political and military necessities.

Obviously, valuational judgments must not be allowed to dominate a narrative to the extent that its factual truthfulness is placed in jeopardy. Nevertheless, although explicit value-judgments can be eliminated from written history, implicitly valuational language performs a useful function in history, by contributing to our understanding of it according to its true nature. Therefore, where it is appropriate and "moderate", it is to be retained. For the reader valuational language provides a grounded point of view on the facts: it gives him as well a key to the historian's interpretation of events. The reader is not given a point of view which he is compelled to accept, or one which he may only reject with considerable trouble if

40. Edward Gibbon: Decline and fall of the Roman Empire (New York, n.d.), II, 93 (chap. XXXVIII).

he possesses that degree of historical sophistication which will enable him to "get at" the facts "behind" the account. Rather, if he follows the historian's account with a fair degree of attention, the valuation and interpretation to be found in the historian's language may be straightforwardly rejected by him. Interpretation here refers to the interpretation of a basic "set" of facts; on account of their differing points of view, historians may come to make radically different selections of facts, but in this we are presented with a more complex problem which cannot be discussed at this point.

7. Different standards and a common interpretation

Since the historian's valuational interpretation does not in good faith claim an obligatory acceptance by the reader in the way that his statements of fact do, there is clearly no necessity for historians to agree on common standards, or on a common interpretation from different standards. Meiland has suggested that the common attainment of a single interpretation of a historical event by historians with different standards and values is the way in which we might come to achieve objectivity in history. To see how it is incorrect -- and incorrect in two ways -- Meiland's position must be looked at in some detail. He writes:

> A truly objective conclusion is one that is reached on the basis of different sets of standards because, when different standards are used, the bias inherent in

> one or another of these sets of standards is allowed for or eliminated. By the use of different standards, the truth is, so to speak, "triangulated" or approached from different directions. The principle here is similar to that used when one does a mathematical problem in several different ways so as to rule out possible error made by the use of only one method.[41]

It is worthwhile pausing here to remark that the concept of "triangulation" as it is set out above is inapplicable to the historical problem under consideration. Meiland's principle of triangulation in history is not at all similar to the process involved in the mathematical example. A mathematical problem involves the use of various practical methods within the same set of mathematical standards. In science, unaccepted standards and results obtained by their application to problems -- the occult, for example -- are ruled out of order. Mathematicians are in agreement regarding their methodology and the principles underlying it; most historians too are in substantial agreement regarding the way in which their practical work should be done. A historian too will often approach his subject in different practical ways: he will, for instance, arrive at the same conclusions several times by working from different evidence. Scientists for the most part are in agreement about one scheme of interpretation, that scheme which embodies their scientific standards governing interpretation; historians are not in agreement regarding a corresponding scheme of historical standards of interpretation in their work. We must bear this in mind as we go on to discuss Meiland's ideas about the attainment of

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41. Scepticism and historical knowledge (New York, 1965), 108.

objectivity in history. From the passage just cited above Meiland goes on to say:

> The highest degree of objectivity consists in agreement on particular judgments on the basis of different standards. This seems to be part of the concept of objectivity, that is, part of the meaning of the term "objectivity". Thus it is desirable for historians to have different standards. Only if they use different standards can the kind of "triangulation" previously mentioned occur; if they all used the same standards, we would suspect their conclusions of being subjective for the reasons given above, even if they all agreed on those conclusions. This kind of "triangulation" achieves the same result as the use of an unbiased or impartial observer would.[42]

Firstly, Meiland asserts that "triangulation" would ensure that bias was corrected. I have already pointed out that that analogy of history with mathematics is quite unsatisfactory; but even so, it is still not clear from the context whether Meiland is referring to common results achieved independently by historians with different standards, or to results that ultimately would really be a compromise. Given that the facts of the Reformation (to use Meiland's own example) are all known -- or if this is not the case with the Reformation, it is certainly true about some other historical problems -- it is the fact now, at this present time, that historians disagree about their interpretation. If the various interpretations are logically consistent with the historians' standards, future agreement would require different standards. If the future common interpretation results from various historians' agreement on an interpretation, this will be because those historians are workings towards a compromise common standard, or at least are changing their own

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42. Ibid., 109.

standards (in detail). Meiland's suggestions about "triangulation" cannot work so long as different results, different interpretational conclusions, are in existence; nor could they be held to be true so long as it was possible that different results might exist. In Meiland's terms only the probability of objectivity is increased if several conclusions agree or a common account is achieved. While other accounts do exist or can exist, there is still the possibility that they, or indeed no account at all, will represent the desired objective position. If twenty-first century Protestants and Catholics agree on an interpretation of the Reformation, there would still be the possibility of interpretations derived from the standards of nineteenth-century or seventeenth-century Protestants and Catholics. Compromise in interpretation, or a common interpretation proper, may be quite impossible when some basic historical standards of interpretation are incompatible in their very principles.

Secondly, it is not true that a number of different standards, when compared in some way, will succeed in "cancelling each other out" completely; yet that this would be true in appropriate circumstances is what Meiland seems to be implying by his maintenance of the position that "triangulation" can lead to a result equivalent to impartiality. Meiland writes that

> if many different standards and values are used, all of which yield the same results, this would approach the condition of using no particular set of standards and values; that is, this would approach the situation of the unbiased or impartial observer. So this sort of

> "triangulation" can serve in the place of the unbiased or impartial observer. And this sort of "triangulation" seems to be at least one very important thing which can be meant by "objectivity".[43]

However, it must be pointed out that it is not the case that the use of a multiplicity of standards and values, even if they produce the same results, approaches of itself the situation of the unbiased observer. To begin with, the relativist is right when he says that there can be no unbiased observers of history (in the relativist and not the everyday sense of "unbiased"). When we talk of an unbiased observer of history, we are not using "unbiased" in quite the same way as we may do in other circumstances; rather we are contrasting one sort of bias with another sort, as I shall explain below when I come to talk about "committed history". Even a quasi-scientific objectivity regarding historical events (if it could really exist) would be for some people an example of bias and prejudice. The "unbiased" historian will find his own standards thought of in some societies as typifying, with other examples, "biased" history. Now, we can only believe that all these different standards which have been exemplified in the histories of the past and present, as well as those to be found in the histories of the future, will cancel each other out (as it might be phrased), enabling us to achieve impartiality, if we can be sure that we have an even spread across the whole spectrum of historical values. An analogy may be helpful here. On some slips of paper are printed positive or

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43. Ibid.

negative numbers -- one number on each slip. From these slips, which, it is claimed, are representative of the range of possible whole numbers, I may be asked to select a certain sample; following a process like "triangulation", I am at the end to add up the numbers on the selected slips in order presumably to find a balanced result. The equivalent of impartiality in this case should be represented by a total of zero; but this total will only result from a "correct" balance in the slips of paper before any selection and from a random sampling that does not happen to be statistically "wild". The total may turn out to be 6, or 2, or -13. With a proper sample I shall know, of course, that this represents, or (usefully) approaches, a neutral position for the slips of paper as a whole, but if I think that this represents "true" neutrality I shall be deluded. The total of the slips of paper may well itself be biased to the positive or to the negative. And I shall only know this if I know what zero is already. Similarly, a historical sample of standards may itself be biased, so that the combined result will not necessarily be anything like an "impartial" one, but merely one, at least, that is moderated away from the most extreme members of the sample. (Naturally it will be "approaching" impartiality in a strictly literal sense; but Meiland surely means to say, in talking of an "approach", that the result, if not actually impartial, would be very close to being so.) I may believe that I have an objectively impartial result; but I shall be wrong. I may hold (or define) the

result as impartial; but then I shall be committed to a relativistic or intersubjective concept of impartiality -- I shall have to admit that another age or another society with a different range of standards to work with could well achieve a different "impartial" result. If I know that the result is impartial, this will be because I know what impartiality is already, as I was familiar with zero as the figure that separated positive numbers from negative numbers. But if I know what impartiality is already -- and this is the only way in which I can know the range of standards to be one that contains a fair distribution -- then Meiland's "triangulation" will be a futile exercise.

We could never know which of differing historical interpretations is the (truly) impartial one; but of course the impartiality of a lack or absence of values or of a compromise or conflation of standards is not to be achieved in history. Nor can a single interpretation ever be achieved, since the principles of some historians necessarily entail different results to those of other historians: an extreme dogmatic position may necessitate an almost automatic contradiction of any major statement or claim by the other side. In any case, as matters stand, we already possess widely differing and often quite incompatible interpretational results. To believe, as Meiland seems to, that future (agreed) results will be necessarily supersessive would be to fall victim to the fallacy of inevitable historical progress. A common interpretation

of some historical event will never come about if all the various kinds of historical standards in written history retain their current validity. A common interpretation can only arise from certain theoretically determined and exclusive standards, as in science; but if some standards are to be permissible in history while others are not, the case will hardly be better than that which, Meiland states explicitly, he does not want -- the situation where common results are obtained through a single standard. Nor is it clear how the question which standards are historically valid could be decided. We could scarcely say that those standards which led regularly to a common interpretation were to be deemed the historically valid standards. Yet surely any other criterion for the validity of historical standards would have been discovered long ago? An agreed value-standard cannot be achieved in history as that discipline is conceived at the moment, because history, far from having the specialist basis which would facilitate the establishment of such a standard, embraces not only in its subject-matter but also in its judgments and attitudes the values of man's social life. Just as many of these values are irreconcilable in the real world so they must be irreconcilable when they are manifested in the standards of the historian.

8. Committed history

I have already pointed out that the valuational judgments incorporated into a historical account, may, if the historian is honest, be accepted or rejected by the reader. The reader too will have his own valuational scheme which will, or will not, be more or less in accord with the historian's scheme as it is made evident in the work of written history. It should not be forgotten that the reader too has a point of view -- the impartial reader is as actually non-existent as the impartial historian. Or if the reader can genuinely be thought of as strictly impartial, this is because the work he is reading is dead and meaningless for him. Valuation by the historian and by the reader is essential to historical understanding. Because history is about man in a social setting, in order to achieve a full understanding of the past, we must bring to bear on our study of it those values which normally contribute to our understanding of the present.[44]

Since valuation is a part of history it must be held as a consequence that "committed history" is not necessarily non-objective. Factual truth may be steadfastly maintained by the committed historian. In a history of the nineteenth century, for example, the committed historian may be saying no more in essence than: 'I favour the cause of radicalism rather than the cause of conservatism.' Thus, that Garibaldi should be praised at the

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44. See below, chap. VIII, sect. 8.

expense of Cavour is only to be expected. The historian's facts need not be impugned: the reader with opposing views may easily disagree with the historian and say to himself: 'I can't see Cavour's actions in that light at all,' or some similar statement. He agrees that what the historian says is factually true; he disagrees with the historian's attitude to the facts.

The historian may be committed in his historical account in three ways. Firstly, his account may be committed in so far as it may be generally considered favourable to his subject-matter; basically, he will be seen as "for" certain individuals, or certain events, or certain historical movements. Secondly, the historian may be considered to be unfavourable to his subject-matter: in this case he will be seen to be "against" certain individuals, or other features of his account. Thirdly, the historian's account may be neutral in its attitude to its subject-matter; but from the point of view of historical understanding such a history is still an example of committed history. Clearly it will often be confused with "uncommitted" or "disinterested" history -- a type of account that will be discussed shortly. Positive neutrality, however, is still very much involved with what took place, just as "favourable" and "unfavourable" histories are. It may not look approvingly or disapprovingly on any of the parties which were actually practically involved in the events under examination, but it does adopt a point of view regarding those events themselves. In history of this

kind, the historian may show his involvement in events by putting forward possible solutions, or by indulging in counterfactual hypothetical statements.

In any account, whether it is one that is favourable or one that is unfavourable to its subject-matter, the historian is bound to be "for" some things and "against" others. However, most historical accounts do have certain focal-points of interest; and the general tenor of a historical narrative, that is, whether it is approving or hostile -- or neutral, is determined largely by the theme of the account or the thesis which the historian wishes to advance. These in their turn will often be determined by the historian's contemporary attitudes -- for example, by his political or social attitudes.[45]

All three types of committed history, it should be noted, may incorporate both "fair" accounts and "unfair" accounts. In other words, an account may be either fair or unfair in its treatment of historical events. If it is unfair, the historian will show in it little or no respect for, or take little or no serious account of, the views of the other party or parties involved in events. If views once held seriously are not taken seriously by the

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45. With regard to "favourable" and "unfavourable" accounts, another point may be made: if a historian's work is largely one that is favourable to its subject, most things which he is "against" will usually be found to occupy a subsidiary position in the narrative, either formally or materially -- that is to say, subsidiary in an "artistic" way, or in regard to the actual substantive content of the account; if it is an "unfavourable" historical account, persons and events of which the historian approves will usually occupy the subsidiary position.

historian, the narrative will clearly be badly balanced and may be considered lacking in historical validity. The "fair" narrative respects other sides, gives their ideas a serious and honest hearing, and perhaps goes on to formulate a well-reasoned criticism. The resulting account is a committed one that is to be considered historically valid. A fair neutral account will begin by having respect for all concerned (where respect is due), even where the historian is in universal disagreement with all concerned.[46] Of course, there may be exceptions to the rule that the historian should have respect for all involved; but if a historian wishes to claim, say, that a whole nation was at some time in the past collectively seized by mass hysteria, then his case will need very adequate substantiation.

The most literally "uncommitted" history differs significantly from neutral history. "Uncommitted" history is the truly "detached" history; the uncommitted or detached historian bears a correspondence in his way to the reader for whom the historical account is a piece of dead prose. To achieve true "scientific" detachment, all types of valuation must be avoided (and not simply moral

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46. When a neutral account is unfair, it will be because the historian sees all the parties involved as, perhaps, "fools" or "knaves" or "creatures of fortune (or fate)". However, points of view of this type may sometimes be the expression of a seriously-held historical world-view; and the resulting accounts can hardly be called in this case "unfair". Theories which account for historical events in terms of chance and accident will often provide examples of such attitudes.

valuation, for commitment need not always be, although it usually is, a moral matter). A "detached" historical account will often fail to be history proper because, in order to achieve a fully disinterested detachment, its component facts must be stripped of all valuation; as a consequence of this they will be stripped of their essential human quality and that quality which makes for their understanding. It is always to be remembered that, in the words of Ann Low-Beer,

> careful attention to both explicit and implicit moral judgments, in our use of ordinary language, and in the principles of value and importance in explanations, is a part of learning to understand history.[47]

Divested of its human aspect in understanding, history fails to be about "persons" (in the philosophical sense of that word); at its best it will be about psychological "objects"; at its worst, it will be as unintelligible (in human historical terms) and as bizarre as unadulterated behaviourism. In no longer being about persons, a detached historical account can hardly, in the end, be fully understood as historical by the reader, unless, of course, he brings previous knowledge or other experience to bear on what he reads.

The term "committed history" is usually taken to signify a history that is, for example, intensely devoted to the support of one "side" in history or propagandization for some "cause". From the logical point of view, however, any account which involves valuation -- especially implicit valuation -- can be thought of as "committed". If we were

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47. Op. cit., 157.

to analyse the instances of valuation in an account, and list all the features of the past that the historian was "for" and all those that he was "against", a coherent pattern of commitment to the holders of certain values and the embodiments of certain processes would become plain to us. All accounts containing valuational judgments and language may be considered, logically, to be "committed history".

Since commitment involves a valuational pattern, and since every valuational pattern, formed as it is by both social conditioning and psychological conditioning (and also by an interaction between the two), is unique with each individual historian, history is manifestly a concern of the individual historian as an individual. History that is done by a working-group or by a committee, and history where the historian attempts to suppress his individuality and even work towards a common anonymous "norm" are examples of attempted suppressions of individual valuation.[48] These types of history do not succeed in eliminating valuation completely (which in any case would leave an account that was no longer really history), and consequently they are still open to the same criticisms as history that includes a full valuation. Since the valuational judgments of a historical account are such an individual matter, and since in many accounts the historian's

48. The Cambridge modern history is a well-known example of a large work where the suppression of individuality on the part of contributors in order to further the attainment of a unity in the work as a whole was not entirely successful.

valuation is a considerable factor in the reader's understanding of events, that understanding will be best aided by valuation which is not suppressed or mutilated in the effort to achieve a spurious "objectivity", but which is allowed to show itself in its full individuality. Nor must it be forgotten that suppression of the historian's individuality will itself be occasioned by a specific set of valuational judgments.

The question raised at the beginning of this chapter was whether a historical account can have a permanent value or worth (as history). We can say, since facts and values can be separated in thought, that with regard to simple factual truths stated, it can; and we can say that with regard also to the values it contains, it can have a permanent validity, for the valuational judgments of a historian will always present us with one way in which the facts of the past may be understood. Historical events, with their essential human aspect, must always be seen and can only be seen charged with values of one sort or another. It is through the historian's interpretation and understanding that the reader's own understanding is awakened, so that written history is not merely a dead account for him. If history is worth reading, it comes to be worth reading through the terms of the historian's and the reader's experience, otherwise a historical account will only present us with a meaningless concatenation of physical events. A full, comprehensible treatment of historical subject-matter requires that the historian have

access to the complete range of man's values; and these are the values of our own experience. History is about men as they take part in social life; and this must involve a world of value as well as a world of fact. But its world of value is not one that is detached from its study in the way that a social science, for example, may study the values of a society. History values its subject-matter comprehensively and not after the fashion of a particular set of values and a single way of looking at things; objective detachment involves only one way of looking at events, and different sciences may look at the same events differently. History adopts comprehensive values because it is an activity not of man in part of his social life but of man in his social life as a whole. The discipline of history is not simply an investigation of men in society; it is also itself an expression of men in society, and as such an expression it will actively adopt the values of its society.

Another class of interpretational judgment is still to be treated, namely, the class of evaluative judgments. Evaluation is a problem discovered in several aspects of the historian's work, notably in description, selection, the relation of facts to each other with regard to their significance, interpretation, and the determination of causal factors. A consideration of evaluation in general, and, in particular, its relation with the individual historian, is best reserved for the discussion of explanation and understanding.

V

THE ARGUMENT FOR GENERAL HISTORY

1. Generalizations and specialized history

To put the argument in its briefest form, history concerns the individual not the general. It is a feature of history (when we mean to refer to it without qualification) that it deals with, and tells us about, concrete individual events and situations in the past. It treats these individual events just as they are and in their own right, although it is true, and often necessary, that to his understanding of any event the historian brings knowledge that he has obtained through the generalizing work of other disciplines. Nevertheless, history does not obscure the essential particular nature of these events either by making them subservient to the working-out of theoretical generalizations and the formulation of general laws, or by merely subsuming them under some scheme of general theory. That the attention of history is directed primarily towards what is particular is discussed elsewhere;[1] in the following pages I wish to look at various types of generalizations, which have been held by some to be an integral part of the historian's work, and show how they cannot be held to be in accordance with the concept of history as it has been defined (with reference

1. See above, chap. II, sect. 7, and below, chap. VI.

to one way in which we definitely need to look at the experience of the past). I shall concentrate on generalizations themselves in the next chapter; in this chapter my attention will be given to the proper place in history of specialized accounts of the past.

As a historical account deals less with individual past facts and concentrates rather on a task of generalization and abstraction it becomes increasingly unparadigmatic of the simple, pure piece of history. I have argued already that there can be no general laws of history as such, but only general laws from some other discipline that are made use of by the historian or general laws in another field that are discovered and elaborated by the (generalizing) historian.[2] Since a really extensive use of generalizations obviously requires considerable knowledge, it is inevitable that a generalizing historical account will become orientated chiefly to one particular discipline, if only because of the necessary limitations of any single person's knowledge. Collaborative writing of history solves the problem of the individual's limitations at the expense of cohesiveness and integration.[3]

In practice an extensively generalizing account will have its title of "history" qualified, to indicate that it is a specialized account with an orientation to some specific discipline. It will be called "economic history", or "political history", for example. Further,

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2. See above, chap. II, sect. 7.

3. See below, chap. IX.

if its connection with individual historical events even only apparently becomes a tenuous one, then the title of "history", however it is qualified, may be found altogether inapplicable. In other words, when an account ostensibly based on historical fact ceases to deal with historical particulars such as events, personalities, or institutions in the past, it should generally no longer be regarded as a historical narrative or work of history. As an account consists more and more of general laws and other generalizations which are not of themselves historical, so there will be less and less room for genuine historical content.

2. The argument against general history

In this discussion of specialized forms of history and general history, it is necessary to take note now of positions which view all proper historical work as inevitably "specialized". For the purpose of my argument it is necessary that the possibility and usefulness of general history be upheld, since this is what the historian, who aims at a representative picture of his subject, is competent as an individual to give us. This is in no way to rule out the possibility and importance of specialized forms of history; nor am I saying that the historian who is qualified in other fields cannot make use in history of any non-historical, specialized knowledge he may think relevant to a problem.

It is maintained by some that there can be really no such thing as serious worthwhile history pure and simple (that is, general history), and that when we speak of history, if we are using the word "history" in any genuinely intellectual discourse, we intend a reference to some kind of "specialized" history: ordinarily we shall mean "social history" or "political history".[4] Of course, it is probably these two branches of history with which the ordinary man is most familiar; and it is these two which readily spring to mind for most people when the word "history" is mentioned. However, I should wish to maintain that it certainly does not seem to be the case that the word "history" must almost always carry such an implicit reference to a particular kind of history, and that we must, if we are truly knowledgeable about history, necessarily conceive of history only in terms of what we should usually call a branch of history, such as political, social, or economic history. Undeniably the word "history" may actually be used in some contexts to refer in fact to "specialized" history; but in most cases it is not to be doubted that "history" really does mean quite simply history. When the word is not being used to refer, by implication, to a particular branch of history, it must be understood to stand for "general history".

Another criticism of general history is made indirectly by Popper in an attack on historicist holism, whose proponents, he asserts, combine

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4. M. M. Postan, in Fact and relevance (Cambridge, 1971), chap. 5, argues this position in detail.

> the correct belief that history, as opposed to the theoretical sciences, is interested in concrete individual events and in individual personalities rather than in abstract general laws, with the mistaken belief that the "concrete" individuals in which history is interested can be identified with "concrete" wholes in sense (a).[5]

This sense (a) has been previously defined by Popper as the sense of 'the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of all the relations holding between its constituent parts'.[6] This combination, Popper asserts, cannot hold, for history cannot grasp wholes: 'history, like any other kind of inquiry, can only deal with selected aspects of the object in which it is interested'.[7]

Although Popper's argument is not directed specifically against advocates of general history (but rather against so-called historicists), it does give some support to "specialized" history in so far as Popper asserts that we can only study aspects of an object. Of course, it is true that we never see the whole of an object at one time, but the aspect that we see is not always and necessarily to be identified with a logical aspect falling within the scope of one discipline. In history, in seeing part of a whole, we often see a part that contains many of the aspects of a whole -- a part that substantially contains the whole. When we are not deliberately pursuing specialized historical studies, the part of the whole that we see

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5. Karl R. Popper: The poverty of historicism (London, 1957), 80.

6. Ibid., 76.

7. Ibid., 80-81.

will frequently be, and should be, adequately representative of the whole in a way in which a logically marked-off aspect of the whole is not.

It has been suggested, then, that to write successful general history is impossible, whether for pragmatic or logical reasons; but I hope to show that this is not in fact the case. Of course, doubts that general history is possible, or at least in any way worthy of serious consideration, do have a very practical foundation. One reason given for the impossibility of general history is that, without specialization in history, there is nothing less than an infinite number of historical facts to be considered. This argument against general history is obviously more formidably applicable to the case of history written by the individual than to the case where historical work is being carried out through a collaborative effort. It may be set out in the following way. The historian, reflecting on the historical problem that confronts him and pondering possible solutions, is presented from the very beginning of his work with one outstanding problem -- that of dealing with all the material that is possibly relevant to the historical subject he has chosen. If his account is to be of any value, it would seem that consciously or unconsciously, in order to present the fullest account possible (that account which has taken into consideration the greatest proportion of relevant facts), he will decide to treat his topic within the limits of a specific (specialized) branch of history.

This specialized branch of history, which will provide the historian with his initial selectional and interpretational orientation (and naturally justify that orientation), will be found in most cases to be related to one of the social sciences, such as economics, political science, or sociology; through this self-imposed limitation the historian's treatment of his topic will result in the production of economic history, political history, or social history.[8] Specialized history, it can be argued, is the examination of a historical period or a historical position under one theoretical aspect alone, a procedure that is necessitated by the infinite plenitude of historical material.

Nevertheless, even if the arguments against general history are accepted, and projects of writing general history are abandoned, it still remains the case that the

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8. At least for the sake of simplicity of argument it is unfortunate that the various types of specialized history are not always related to the corresponding social sciences. This lack of a relationship is especially the case with political history and social history which are often the product of the same type of non-disciplinary procedure as general history itself; the qualification of their titles refers only to the general orientation of their subject-matter. Many works of political history have few references, explicit or implicit, to political science; and social history often has an equally tenuous connection with sociology or related disciplines. Because of this, it should be quite feasible to make further useful distinctions within specialized branches of historiography in the way that one may differentiate, for example, between general political history (history of political facts alone) and scientific political history (history where political facts are related to general political principles). The distinction between the "general" and the "scientific" forms of history could prove to be an important one, but it is surprisingly not a distinction that is often expressly made.

problem of dealing with a multitude of historical facts is in no way solved. With a concentration on one aspect of a historical situation or on one specialized historical topic, from one single disciplinary viewpoint, the facts that are relevant will still be numberless. No matter how apparently limited the historian's subject may be, his account of it can never be complete. The reason for this is a straightforward one:

> No historian hitherto has had at his command all the sources which might be relevant to his subject; none has ever completed his work so that no newly emerging source could invalidate it.[9]

No continuing contraction of the theoretical limits of any subject under review, and no reduction of the real factual content of the subject will generally result in a simplification and resolution of the theoretical difficulties that are ascribed to 'the sheer immensity of past experience'.[10] Regarding all historical problems, with only a very few exceptions, it may be asserted that for practical reasons no historian can consider all the possibly directly relevant facts; and, with no exceptions whatsoever, we can say that no historian can take into account all the factors affecting his work which might well have an indirect relevance (for example, the reliability of a printed copy of the transcription of a manuscript, the generally accepted interpretations of difficult words in a foreign

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9. Sir George Clark: "History and the modern historian" (General introduction to The new Cambridge modern history) (Cambridge, 1957), xx-xxi.

10. Postan: op. cit., 50.

language, the accuracy of the dating of archaeological finds related to historical work), of course he will be expected to have a fair knowledge in some related fields and to examine some of the problems bearing indirectly on his own chosen subject.

Nevertheless, the contention that general history is impossible has a prima facie justification: many general textbooks and universal histories, and even intelligent and serious general histories which are restricted to a fairly well-defined period or region, turn out to be at bottom a collection of independent chapters and essays which can offer, at most, little more than the superficial connection of period or region as a basis for their claim to be a single, unified work of history. This state of affairs, however, need not be a cause of pessimism: it does not show that a complete, general history is wholly impossible. What it does show us is that an integrated account of various aspects of a part of the past is not ordinarily so easy to attain as might but thought, but presents the historian with the important problem of how he provides his subject-matter with a unifying cohesion. But this problem of the "integration" of an account must be left until we have examined the reasons that general history is a necessary part of historical work.

3. Two arguments in support of general history

Against the contentions of those opposed to general history two types of argument can be advanced in support of general history. The claim to be substantiated is that general history is the most complete form of history: it can be supported by both a pragmatic argument and a philosophical argument.

It is true that much historical work centres on problems that have their origin and their significance substantially in one disciplinary branch of history; some of the historian's topics, quite rightly, are highly specialized indeed. Historians will frequently choose to deal, for example, with such specialized and confined subjects as, in social history, the emergence and growth of railway labour in Victorian England, or in educational history, a historical account of the training of teachers in Scotland, or, in economic history, the growth of the Staffordshire pottery industry. In a more general way, the historian will frequently deal too with such wider, but still strictly non-general topics as, in social history, the electoral sociology of modern Britain, or, in political history, the Carolingians and the Frankish monarchy, or, in religious history, the Spanish church and the papacy in the thirteenth century. All these subjects are very typical of genuine historical interests involving a limited type of subject-matter, and because of their limitations they can be dealt with in terms of the relevant

specialized form of history; and in those terms a complete account of the subject will be provided.

However, a very important part of the historian's work does not deal with such unequivocally discipline-oriented topics as those mentioned above, even in those cases where the subject-matter of an account is very well defined or specified. Plainly there are many historical problems requiring treatment which are of an interdisciplinary nature in that they deal with interactions between different fields that are not obviously closely related. For example, a historian may examine and write about a topic like "art and politics in the Weimar republic", or, combining religious, social, administrative, and political aspects of the past, "church, state, and schools in Britain between 1800 and 1900", or, joining intellectual history to social history, "the social context of modern French thought".

Even when a specialized topic is the subject of a piece of history, it is not uncommon that the origins or results of the problem and its resolution are to be found quite extensively outside any one discipline alone. An apparently narrow subject like "the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland and Wales" has its origins in many different kinds of political, social, and cultural conditions; and studies of fairly closely defined topics like "the Thirty Years War" will, in causes, effects, and interactions, require the historian, if he wishes to present the fullest account, to conduct his research in almost

every field of history conceivable. For many seemingly specialized subjects the historian will require and use a wider knowledge of the past than can be found within one single discipline.

Many historians have as their central interests topics that are not simply an apparent amalgam of different disciplinary interests, but are, to the degree in which they present the historian with an interdisciplinary problem, fully integrated and unified. Where these fully integrated interdisciplinary interests do occur, it will be plain that they are not somehow incidental to the work of a historian (considered ideally) or something to which history is not really obliged to give its attention: they are an essential part of historical work. Some historian will be expected to give a full and properly detailed treatment of, for example, a topic like nationalism, or a subject like the historical role of the state in a given society. Again, daily life in ancient Rome is an example of a subject embracing many fields and requiring genuine historical treatment; and people in the past in general, such as the early Victorians, also provide a centre of interest for historians. More complex themes like "dissent and rebellion in the twentieth century" or "the age of the common man" are also authentic subjects for historical study while requiring proper elaboration over several disciplines. And it may reasonably be held that, at least on the level of theory, intellectual history, or the history of ideas, is also very often a fully interrelated

study of different fields. Biography too almost always demands some sort of general approach and cannot be developed satisfactorily in terms of purely specialized history, since, even when a specialized history of someone's life is intended (a political biography, for example), an account, integrated with the central theme, will to some extent be required of a person's other interests and activities. To give a better idea of how such topics are to be dealt with by general history rather than specialized history, it will be helpful to amplify two examples: nationalism, and the state's involvement in a society.

Nationalism, with reference to a specific country or a particular age (as well as nationalism, or types of nationalism, in general), often provides a subject for the historian's attention. In itself it is obviously to be considered both a well-defined and important topic, certainly worthy of, and needing, historical treatment. It is true that certain aspects of nationalism may be studied by, among other disciplines, sociology, or social psychology, or political science. But nationalism itself is not, in its fullest conception and in all its manifestations, an object of investigation in one of its particular instances for any discipline other than history; nor can it fall entirely within the scope of any one other discipline. When the historian comes to examine a certain instance of nationalism in its own right, he will have to develop his studies in several fields that are otherwise non-historical. The symptoms of nationalism, its origins, and its

many manifestations and effects are to be investigated in many areas: culturally, in ideas, in language, in art and literature; socially, in the development of institutions, in racial and other forms of discrimination; economically, in a desire for self-sufficiency, in protectionism and tariff-policy, in moves against foreign ownership of industries and resources; politically, in the development of inward-looking policies, in the adoption of an aggressive or unco-operative stance towards neighbouring countries; and indeed, in many other branches of a nation's, and an individual's, life.

An examination of the second example will reveal similar ramifications in a wide variety of fields. A history of the state's role is a suitable and necessary subject of historical study; and it too will be found to require a treatment extending in many disciplines. From the social viewpoint, there will have to be an understanding of the government's policies and social aims; from the political viewpoint, the origin and formation of the government and its administrative functions will have to be understood; economically, there will have to be an examination of taxation, finance, and the role of public utilities, state monopolies and nationalized industries. And education, religion, and the state's cultural policies generally will need to be looked at and investigated. The contributions from many fields to the origins and growth of the state's involvement in society will have to be thoroughly examined; and all these different subjects of

the historian's attention will be given an authentic unity by their references to the political conception of a state and to this real state (under study) in particular.

The themes of nationalism and the state's role in a society provide two examples of well-defined subjects within general history. They are subjects that must be seen as part of general history, for they cannot be subsumed under some discipline as a type of specialized history. They are subjects that require attention from the historian, and must be given a proper historical treatment by him. A concentration on specialized history, a stipulation that only specialized history is proper history, would leave subjects like these either almost completely unexamined in their own right or treated in a one-sided fashion in terms of one discipline alone.

Many events in history are important in more than one field. For pragmatic reasons alone, therefore, the historian will frequently require a general rather than a specialized approach to his problem. But a subject like nationalism, although its comprehensive treatment within general history is pragmatically necessitated, through its own complexity provides the historian with a conceptual justification for general history. Even when nationalism is analysed and treated in various specialized fields, the full meaning of its constituents is only given through a reference back to the general concept, and so, implicitly, only found in the interdisciplinary relationships of general history and its unification of human experience.

Of course, it must in no sense be understood that specialized history is somehow diametrically opposed to general history, for it most certainly is not. If I assert that the historian fulfils himself completely only through adopting a general and not a specialized approach, I mean only to say that for a truly comprehensive understanding any specialized treatment (and specialized treatment is almost always required at some stage in historical study) is either preliminary to a more general account or is developed within an already established general framework: even when it is not directly given in a specialized account, an extensive general framework is often tacitly understood.

As I hope I have shown, pragmatic considerations alone provide an adequate justification for general history; but they do not provide the only justification. General history can also be given a sound philosophical basis; and this basis is to be found in the very subject-matter of history. History is about man in society; and man, as the subject of history, is not man in <u>one</u> of his activities, but man as such, and therefore man in all his activities.

History is about man; and man is a single being, whose aspects and activities are interrelated and interacting, fused in a single whole. As <u>human</u> activities, we can only finally understand the activities of man as we conceive them to be the activities of a whole, with each in its proper place in a comprehended relation with the

others. As Cassirer observes:

> Man's outstanding character, his distinguishing mark, is ... his work. It is this work, it is the system of human activities, which defines and determines the circle of "humanity". Language, myth, religion, art, science, history are the constituents, the various sectors of this circle. A "philosophy of man" would therefore be a philosophy which would give us insight into the fundamental structure of each of these human activities, and which at the same time would enable us to understand them as an organic whole. Language, art, myth, religion are no isolated random creations. They are held together by a common bond.[11]

For a true completeness of understanding to be achieved, the activities of man must be seen 'as an organic whole'; and it is the task of history to help us to do this with regard to man's past. General history should provide us with a description of man's activities as a whole. History cannot ultimately be complete if it simply gives an account of these activities in discretely considered parts.

When we concentrate on the subjects of purely specialized history, we may lose sight of man as a whole; we may forget about the interdependence of man's faculties and abilities and activities. Clearly, some specialized accounts of "aspects" of man are necessary; but a wholehearted concern with specialization can be left to other disciplines. History has the power to provide us with an account of the past of man in a way that retains the unity of that concept of man which we possess. If it forgoes its opportunities, part of an understanding of the concept of man will be lost. For this understanding, as one that is complete, lies importantly in an appreciation of how

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11. Ernst Cassirer: An essay on man (New Haven, 1944), 68.

the different aspects of man interact and develop in the whole, in a comprehension of the organic wholeness of man. To write economic history, or political history, or cultural history alone means that we are writing about economic man, or political man, or cultural man, as if these were in some way complete and real types of individual men. Whenever we write about man in one of his aspects, we must remember that we are only writing about an aspect, something that is only and essentially a part of a whole. Because economic man is always a part of man, because economic history is always a part of history, concepts of this kind must forever in their innermost nature remain historically incomplete.

Obviously specialized histories are necessary, but they are only truly comprehensible with a knowledge of the background of general history to which they belong; so, for those histories, it is general history which provides the first foundation for their understanding. General history is that study which gives to specialized histories their completeness, which provides the full background on which comprehendible specialization in history depends, which allows to man in his past life that completeness which is properly and essentially his, and which alone can provide a final understanding of man in his past.

4. The nature of general history

What exactly is the nature of general history? It is ideally a fully synthesized and unified account of past events. Far from being impossible of attainment, general history is the necessarily complete form of an account of a historical subject. An account of past events in their social, or economic, or cultural aspect may be entirely satisfactory as far as it goes, and it may be genuinely comprehensive in its own field with the disciplinary limitations that it imposes on itself; as history considered simply and wholly, however, it will be inadequate and incomplete, for history as such, with no qualification, must give us a complete account and satisfy the desires of both the historian and his readers to know the past, and understand it, as fully and deeply as possible. To understand the past fully, it will not be enough for the interested person to read together, compare and synthesize the differing specialized works on the same subject. For example, in order to gain a genuine historical knowledge of sixteenth-century England, it will not in the end be sufficient to take the relevant specialized works of political history, social history, economic history, cultural history and so on, and study them together. From these written histories and the various aspects of actual history that they describe there must be created a synthesis that embodies a new unity, that demonstrates different relations (and fuller ones) between the various elements

of history, that tells not solely about the cultural behaviour or political behaviour or social behaviour of people in the sixteenth century but about their lives as a whole; this synthesis will form an account that stands as a (general) history of sixteenth-century England. Some historians might say that it is really a matter for the reader himself to make a synthesis of different aspects of events as they are related in specialized histories; but if that is held to be the case, then it is evident that the historian too, if he is called upon to do so, should be able to construct a satisfactory general history, not merely because such a synthesis is possible, but because as a historian he should be more knowledgeable about past events and hence more competent than the reader to create the historical synthesis. One of the historian's principal tasks is to enable his audience to understand the past, and, in their variety (as political, or economic, or social, for example), past events cannot be completely understood unless they are presented by the historian in a way representative of their entirety.

General history presents an account of past events in their entirety. Ideally a general history will be a complete account of its chosen subject. It would naturally be a mistake to suppose that by talking of a "complete" account some sort of numerical completeness is intended. Nevertheless, the position that advocates a disciplinary specialization within history does not seem to take fair account of what a "complete" history could be. Obviously

there is a literal sense in which the term "complete history" can be understood: it is logically conceivable that there could be a work of history which would really tell us everything, at least about a closely defined problem. And it is one of the arguments of the relativist against the possibility of objectivity in history that a "complete" history is not one that is practically possible. An account is always poorer in content than the actuality of which it is supposed to be an account. But, as Mandelbaum points out:

> The fallacy in this consists in the attempt to identify the knowledge which we may be said to have concerning some object will all of the characteristics of that object. Such an identification is fundamentally out of keeping with the nature of knowledge in any and every field of human experience. When a person claims to have knowledge of an object he does not necessarily believe that he apprehends the nature of every one of that object's characteristics.[12]

If we were to allow for a moment that the possibility of a literally complete history might be a practical one, and imagined attempts being made to give the idea real instantiation, we should come to see that the realization of such a history would result in an account resembling in some respects the map which, in its endeavours to represent everything in every detail, would necessarily be a perfectly detailed, full-size replica of its original. A full-size, fully detailed map would be an entirely useless one, of course; and although the making of an analogy between a geographical map and a historical account should not be extended too far, it can be safely used to point

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12. Maurice Mandelbaum: The problem of historical knowledge (New York, 1967), 83-84.

out that an important part of the value of a historical account, like that of a map, is founded on its selectivity: detail that will increase the understanding of the user or reader is included; superfluous detail, or detail that might prove an obstacle to comprehension, is excluded or eliminated, or, as it is often phrased, "placed in a proper perspective". The result of an attempt to relate everything in any single historical account would be that, even if practical success were attainable, as a numerically complete history, as a total compilation of all the known facts, the account would, in any case, be of no use to other historians, or anyone else. The making of a fair and representative selection of facts is one of the historian's tasks; we must realize, as Berkhofer writes, that

> even if the historian could reconstruct or re-create the total past, as many historians would at first seem to wish, he would still need to select from this melange the facts he would present in his history of it. Complete re-creation would just mean the historian's job was yet to be done once again.[13]

Given the actual situations and contexts of historical problems, it must be concluded that a complete history -- a numerically complete one, that is to say, containing all the known facts -- is unattainable and would, in any case, have no practical value. Obviously a "complete history", for the purposes of historiography, must have a more sensible meaning.

A successful general history will be a complete history. To understand the notion of a "complete history"

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13. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr.: A behavioral approach to historical analysis (New York, 1969), 14.

it is necessary to make a distinction between numerical completeness, as exemplified by the historical account that would tell us every detail of everything that happened, and one of qualitative or representative completeness as this would be present in a history that gives to us a fair and fully representative picture of a period, say, or a place, or an institution.

It is part of the task of the historian to present a thoroughly representative account of his subject, and it is in its representativeness that the true historical completeness of an account is to be found. And again, since the conception of man as an organic whole leads to the conception of history as the general history that partakes of and conveys this unity of man, a fully representative work will represent this unity: historically considered, it must be general history that comes closest to being truly representative and hence truly complete.[14]

5. Divisions in general history

A narrative of general history is one part of the past considered as entire. As history it must still be divided in some way, being restricted to a particular region or a particular era, for example, or perhaps to a comparison between two or more periods, or areas, or historical institutions. In consequence, the advocate of

14. The idea of the representativeness of history has also been developed previously, in chap. II, sect. 4, and chap. IV, sect. 2.

general history may well be confronted with the following question: If general history is preferable to specialized history (in so far as it is the culminating synthesis of the latter), how is it that universal history is not preferable, for parallel reasons, to general history? If it is going to be maintained that historical understanding is attainable only by an examination of past events in a synthesis of their various aspects, surely, the objection may run, full historical comprehension can only be attained through a consideration of all past events together, by means of what would be a new and higher historical synthesis -- a synthesis of general histories.

In the end it must be seen that everything has a bearing on everything else in the past, and by implication, therefore, in written history too, especially since historical accounts look to what succeeds past events as well as to what is contemporary to, or precedes, those events. It is because of this that in history events contemporarily remote may be related through various interactions that took place between events that directly followed them; for example, a historian of the sixth-century Byzantine Empire often keeps in mind events in the Arabian peninsula which led to the rise of Islam in the seventh century, or a historian of the later Moghul Empire in India could in his work show an interest in some part of what was happening in far-off Britain at the same time. Since consideration of important events will often be necessarily cursory in a universal history, for certain pragmatic reasons at least

history can without significant loss of understanding be divided into sections and treated according to period or region, or some other general concept. But objections against universal history in fact go further than this, for universal accounts often seem to be coupled with philosophy of history of the speculative kind, which involves a use of historical material that is hazardous to history proper. In any case, in the selection of topics for treatment, the universal historian must exercise a truly swingeing choice.[15]

Most importantly, for the problem of how the past can be most satisfactorily dealt with, history does naturally fall into certain divisions. The historian is concerned with certain problems, and these problems are both defined by certain temporal events and their contexts and made more readily understandable when those contexts are marked off from the rest of history. Again, certain periods show for some purposes a special distinctiveness which justifies their being separated out by the historian from the rest of history. On the other hand, it must always be remembered that periodization is created by the evidence and the historian's interpretation of it; it is itself in no way real but is only a means of typifying history. Consequently the historian must never allow any period to become

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15. For a useful treatment of the problem of universal history, see G. Barraclough: "Universal history", in Approaches to history, ed. H. P. R. Finberg (London, 1962). Barraclough provides fair criticism of most types of universal history, but strongly advocates a new type of world history, or history with a global perspective, which will apparently still be periodized.

rigidly conceptualized, and to determine, rather than to be determined by, our conception of past events. The process of periodization is an empirical one, which is shaped by the historian.[16]

To soften and blur the standard dividing lines, and perhaps to spur historians to modify or abandon those lines, the provision of "overlapping" historical accounts is certainly adequate.

The allowance of periodization as legitimate and indeed necessary in history returns us to our original problem in a different form. If there are acceptable divisions in history according to period and region, how is it that further divisions of history according to topic (divisions, that is, of a disciplinary nature) cannot be allowed? If the use of periods and regions in history has certain decided advantages of a pragmatic nature and is necessitated by the historian's interpretation of the past, and does not itself lead to any essential loss of historical understanding as a whole, then disciplinary division would seem _prima facie_ both to provide us with further advantages and to be in some cases necessitated by the historian's approach. How is it that disciplinary division is essentially detrimental to the completeness and comprehensiveness of the historical understanding of a subject?

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16. Cf. Gordon Leff: _History and social theory_ (London, 1969), 150. Chapter VII of this book gives an excellent treatment at length of the problem of periodization in history.

Pragmatic considerations are not all-important in history. A limitation of topic imposed by the restrictions of a particular discipline obviously offers the historian considerable advantages in procedure, providing him, for example, with a sure basis for selection and interpretation. Nevertheless, regionalized or periodized history retains a greater justification in the past events themselves than does specialized history. After a certain fashion it might be true that universal history (of an ideal form) should be considered as really the only ultimately satisfactory history. To understand any historical event completely (again, that is, to understand it in an ideal way) the historian must at a minimum have the acquaintance of a surprising number of other quite disparate events and facts of general knowledge. Indeed this is true not only of "ideal" accounts but, to a lesser degree, of "ordinary" competent accounts of history. Nevertheless, when the unrealizable aim of a genuine and satisfactory universal history has been abandoned, it has to be conceded that, say, a general history of France in the eighteenth century is a historically complete account of a part of the past in a way in which the intellectual history of the Enlightenment, or an account of daily life at the court of Louis XV, is not.[17] History is the study of man in society, and neither intellectual matters nor aspects of the everyday behaviour of a small, select group of persons give us

17. By making this statement I intend to imply no more than that such accounts are logically not the final level of historical statements about a period in its particular and concrete aspect that the historian may hope to attain.

a full picture of man in society during a certain period. A general history of eighteenth-century France would also be more complete than a history which attempted to remove the obstacles of region and period, or at least to straddle them, but confined itself to specialized topics. The particular regarded wholly is more complete than an aspect of the particular even when that is universalized. It is with the individual man in his full being that completeness must come first in history.

6. The integration of a historical account

The integration of a piece of history comes about through the creation of a common focus for the disparate topics of a single narrative; superficially this seems to count against the argument for general history: the statement that any integrated account must have a starting-point or point of reference which will, or at least often should, dominate the account through its course appears to provide a good reason for denying the possibility of general history. Any point of reference chosen must be likely to be very specifically defined in its nature; and it would therefore tend to ground the narrative in some kind of specialized field.

It can hardly be denied that no historical account can present us with the story of the past in any ideally egalitarian way; nor indeed can any account of the world, or part of it, be observationally neutral. As I have

pointed out above, the opponents of the possibility of general history suggest that true general history is impossible because general history could only be successfully achieved with a numerically complete, total compilation of all relevant historical facts. In a related way they seem to hold, although this is true, in many cases, only implicitly, that general history, if it could exist, would have to be perfectly balanced in a material fashion: for example, it would not place economics before politics, or give to the treatment of culture twice the space accorded to the treatment of religion, unless this was really objectively justified. General history would observe as completely as possible a "neutrality" regarding its various disciplinary subdivisions, and since such neutrality, even if it could be developed as a meaningful concept, would obviously be quite impossible for practical reasons alone, a satisfactory general historical account would never be successfully completed.

The ideal of general history, as that ideal might be conceived by the supporters of sectoral specialization, necessitates that no special emphasis be placed on the facts within, and according to, the scope of any specific academic discipline. But it is evident that in actuality many historical accounts will be concerned with a particular non-historical subject as the main point of interest and the actual problem with which the historian is quite legitimately involved: the subject, for example, might be a strongly political or economic one. Notwithstanding the

intrinsic nature of such a subject, it should be apparent that the choice of an economic or political subject does not entail an economic or political treatment of that subject resulting in a specialized account of economic or political history. An economic problem can form the topic of a general historical account just as a non-economic problem may be the subject of a work of economic history, and plainly a similar position holds with respect to other kinds of apparently specialized problems. And it must be additionally remembered that many historical accounts will be devoted to a particular problem which cuts across subject boundaries. Any account must concentrate in one way or another on a particular aspect of the past; and for this reason, if we accept the arguments of the opponents of general history, it would appear that a successful attempt to give an account of the past in its totality must be impossible. The integrating focus of a historical work will lead to a material bias for which the historian cannot compensate.

No historian, however, would maintain that in his work he must not take account of some facts and ignore others. What is meant, surely, by a good general history is, for example, an integrally conceived book which may devote separate but interconnected chapters to different facets of a particular period or region or problem; or -- and this might turn out to present an even more integrated view of the past -- a book which, starting from one aspect of the historical events under consideration -- social

life, for example -- may study all the other aspects in a fair and balanced fashion in relation to this first, central aspect. It is probably necessary for a good general history to have a definite point of view or some discernible orientation in the way it presents its account of the past; it is not necessary for history to be limited substantially by a concern with a specialized treatment of its topic, or an orientation towards a specific non-historical discipline.

The particular integrating focus of a historical narrative will frequently be given by a main theme in the narrative or by a thesis about some problem, perhaps, which the historian is concerned to advance. What exactly is meant by terms like "theme" and "thesis" will be developed later in terms of historical understanding.[18] It needs only to be emphasized here that, as I mentioned above, the study of an economic problem need not lead to an account of economic history, and that similarly, while possibly specialized in itself, a theme or thesis need by no means give rise to the production of specialized history, even though it is the pivot of the narrative.

7. General history and the individual historian

If it is accepted that general history is the most complete end-product of historical work, what important points about general history are there to be noted with

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18. See below, chap. VIII, sect. 8.

regard to the individual historian? For the individual historian two points of significance arise from the quantity of material on any one subject at the historian's disposal. The individual himself cannot possibly hope to acquaint himself with all the material that is relevant to his subject. The quantity of historical material that is readily available in connection with any one subject (with no account taken of new material that the historian's own research may discover) can obviously be used as a contribution to the argument against the individual historian: a group of historical workers, it would seem, will be able to deal more easily with more of the relevant material than will any individual. It may be that a working-group will do better; but it will not be much more likely than the individual to achieve universal coverage of the material. Although the group will be able to cover very much more, its real historical knowledge of the historical situation, although probably greater in quantity, is very unlikely to be much more representative of the subject than that of the individual. All in all, given that he adopts the right approach to his material, the individual historian is capable of attaining no less adequate knowledge and understanding of a historical situation than is any group; what is necessary for correct historical assessment is a proper sampling of available evidence, not a complete survey of it. Such a proper sampling is fully within the individual historian's power. If the group has the advantage of the historian in some cases, this will be

balanced by the individual's openness to the workings of intuition; for example, no group as such can make those spontaneous connections between seemingly irrelevant facts that may occur illuminatingly to the individual.

It may be objected that there will still be individuals within the group, and so there will still be room for intuition. However, the scope of the subject chosen for group work and the method of approach to historical study will be different from the scope of the subject an individual historian would select and the method he would use. Given the different scope of the group's subject and its different working-methods, the workings of the individual mind alone are likely to prove inadequate.

It must be concluded that, in working on a narrative of general history, the historian, as an individual who is largely on his own, will be under a more or less severe quantitative limitation regarding his use of material, but that, in most instances, this will not entail a qualitative significance for the results of the historian's work. Although an adequate sampling of the actual amount of historical material will not prove an obstacle to the powers of the individual historian, it may be that the different sorts of specialized material, such as economic, political, or scientific material, encountered in research will present the historian with more serious difficulties in his attempts at synthesis. Again, it would seem that a group consisting of individuals with different specializations could deal more satisfactorily with different sorts

of material than the individual who, relatively speaking, will be ignorant about the details of most or all non-historical fields.

In dealing with the difficulties presented here, however, another aspect of the historian's work has to be taken into account -- that of explanation. The topic of explanation will be treated in detail later: for the moment, it must be enough to remember that the explanation of past events can form an important part of the historian's work, although it is incorrect to think of it as being the chief task of the historian and a necessary adjunct to his work of description. Little specialized knowledge is required to describe, but much will often be required to explain. In a later chapter, however, I hope to show how, even if the historian might seem deficient in some highly specialized areas of explanatory knowledge, he can contribute through his very individuality to historical understanding. And again, the literary considerations of a historical narrative will ensure that where the historian may seem to be placed at a disadvantage by his lack of the requisite specialized knowledge, the artistic and literary merits of an individual's work as a whole will outweigh a technically more detailed explanation that is possibly to be found in some hypothetical group's work.[19] In any case where specialized knowledge is indisputably a

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19. For an examination of the affinities between the historical narrative and various literary art-forms, and the contribution of the literary features of a historical narrative to the understanding of history, see below, Chap. VIII, sect. 8, and chap. IX, sect. 4.

necessary requirement, there can be no objection (from those who maintain the central importance of individuality in history) if the historian requests assistance from another individual, or group, possessing the appropriate knowledge, and incorporates what he learns into his general account. This kind of incorporation of another person's knowledge into his account will in no way result in a diminution of the significance of his own individuality in that account.

Of course, there are many other problems connected with general history which do not figure very importantly among the problems of specialized history, since in the latter kind of history, the problems the historian chooses are already limited in a way that frequently entails certain decisions about some theoretical issues in history. Such problems as periodization, the choice of subject, the selection of material, and the orientation of the narrative can form the basis of important and unavoidable questions in general history; but in this present context they are not problems peculiar to the individual historian as such, and so they need not be treated here. Where appropriate, I have discussed such problems elsewhere. The problems of general history that are specific to the individual historian are, as mentioned above, those of the quantity of relevant material available to him even on the smallest topics, and of the specialized material relevant to many historical problems with which he may have to deal. Once the proper place of these problems in the

historian's work has been made clear, it can be seen that they cannot be used to argue against the primacy of the individual historian in historical work; nor is a dedication to specialized history in any way a pragmatic necessity for the historian in his effort to write a piece of history that both is worthwhile in itself and makes a contribution to historical knowledge and understanding.

VI

GENERALIZATIONS AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY

1. Introduction

It is necessary now to turn to a treatment of the relationship of history and generalization, and eventually, in consequence, to the relationship of history and the social sciences. In this connection an examination must be made of the arguments against the primacy of the particular per se in history and in support of the importance of the general and the scientific in history. However, the position that history is a social science, together with its consequence that, like any other science, it cannot ultimately be concerned with what is individual and particular, is not one that can be adopted without examination as axiomatic. The general character of history must be independently justified before it can be decided that, because of this general character, history must be considered to be, and henceforward developed as, a social science. Similarly, it cannot be said, for the opposing point of view, that history has an important and essential intuitive element, and that consequently there is little place left for generalizations and general laws in a discipline that is forced to deal immediately and intuitively with the concrete and particular. It must be established first that history deals with the individual

and the unique; only then can we assert that, on the basis of the uniqueness of the particular in history, the practice of history has an important and essential intuitive element, and that because of the very personal nature of intuitive processes, finished historical work necessarily partakes of the individuality of those who wrote it.

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is necessary for me to establish the primacy of the particular in history, and to show that ordinarily the general is not something that should be considered a central part of the historian's field. It is not enough to show that history is concerned with the particular -- which is evident enough in most cases -- it must be made clear that history is fundamentally concerned with the particular, and it must be established that written history is not to be thought of as a social science.

One point is agreed on by all who discuss the relationship of history and the social sciences, by the champions of both "artistic" history and "scientific" history: that is, that the basic "raw material" of history consists of evidence that relates in one way or another to concrete, particular facts. Even those who hold that history should be considered a social science in the fullest sense of that term must believe that somewhere in the development of the work of the historian who is a social scientist, there has to be present (at least logically) the equivalent of an integrated historical narrative dealing primarily with particular facts, for otherwise there could be no way of

passing directly from quite discrete past facts to full-fledged generalizations unrelated directly to any specific historical events; that is to say, the particular must be related to other particulars in history before it can be related to the general, and it is the historical narrative, as it is commonly known, which most satisfactorily relates the particular to the particular. Of course, this "historical narrative" may only be implicit at a certain stage in the historian's work, or, in effect, the narrative stage may have been borrowed, as "complete", from the work of another person. Nevertheless, it is true to say that in any general account there must be implicit one or more accounts of the particular, which must be seen as possessing a logical priority (but in no sense a temporal priority) in development, even if these (possible) accounts have never been formulated explicitly. The historical narrative, history as "story", necessarily has a place in any developed work connected with the past of mankind.

Historical work as a whole, or, more generally, work involving historical material, resolves itself, regarding the degree of transformation of historical fact that has taken place in it, into what may reasonably be thought of as a logical continuum.[1] It cannot be said that each of

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1. It must be emphasized that in the following pages, when I talk of a continuum, of priority, of stages, and so on, I am referring only to development logically considered. There is no intention to postulate any real order of development. Indeed, I shall make it clear at more than one point that any logical order in

the stages which may be discerned in this continuum of transformation is separate or is clearly delineated. It is not simply the case that they do not have a clear delineation because they overlap. Each stage may build on actual work, or be built on by the same work, so that there is a continual interaction within the same developing material between the various stages of historical transformation, with the possibility that any stage of work may be important developmentally not only for the stage that follows it but also for the one that precedes it: for example, interpretation of material may lead to a search for new factual evidence, general principles (generalizations) may bring about a recasting of the narrative account of particulars.

It will be useful to give some description, however crude and unrefined, of the continuum or sequence of stages in historical work. We may say that it begins with the simple collecting of facts, the amassing of data, the inductive formulation of certain conclusions from the evidence, the bare presentation and (physical) classification of historical material. It progresses through the (factual) elucidation of simple data and statements of fact about the past to the assembling of some sort of integrated account, involving among other things the sometimes hazardous tasks of interpretation and explanation, and from there to the working-up of historical material

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the development of a historical account is continually confounded in the real process of historical work.

into a finished narrative, which presents an understanding of historical situations that is often dominated by a central topic, theme, or thesis. In other words, written history develops through what is initially "technical" history (or, as it has been called perhaps rather less respectfully, "dry-as-dust" history) to what one writer describes as "vivid" history.[2]

From the stage of a finished narrative about the particular, development of historical material may proceed further: a study of the past may give birth to that sort of account which generalizes, as one might say, in an important way, making comparisons with other periods and other places, coming to general conclusions and making other sorts of general statements. From here the development of the work may logically progress towards the sociological or economic or political sort of survey. Such a sociological, or other non-historical, survey, while it may have been based on history, may itself be nothing more than a general essay, or a series of such essays, in sociology proper. Its overt historical content may be minimal, and the actual past, as it figures in history, may become largely an incidental reference: its usefulness for telling us anything about the past in its particular aspect will often be negligible.

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2. Ihor Ševčenko: "Two varieties of historical writing", History and Theory, 8 (1969). It is worth pointing out that it is, of course, examples of the finished narrative, or "vivid" history, and, unfortunately, not always the best examples of this, with which the ordinary man is most familiar and which he considers to typify written history proper.

Although it is not to my purpose to discuss the speculative philosophy of history in this dissertation, we may in passing note that historical generalizing does not lead only from history to the social sciences. If historical material undergoes another sort of generalizing treatment, for example, that treatment which sees events in the development of mankind as part of a grand design, a genuinely historical account will be transformed into an account of speculative philosophy of history. As with any proposed development of history into a scientifically generalizing discipline, the ultimate result of a speculative treatment of the past is that past events lose their intrinsic significance and become mere instances of some greater law, or, more grandly, ephemeral typifications of some eternal verity.

2. The problem of the limits of history proper

No-one would wish to deny that any point on the continuum of the possible development of historical material displays a close connection with history (both as past actuality and its record) and the work of historians. We can make this statement, however, without thereby being obliged to agree that every point along the continuum is directly a part of the discipline of history or a subject for the immediate attention of the historian. Many other disciplines, or significant parts of them, are closely connected with history and the past, and, although

they are often directly of very great use to some historians in their work, they are indisputably not part of the historian's proper business.[3]

The problem regarding the nature of history and its relationship with the social sciences, and the status of history as a possible social science, is one that really arises from the difficulty of deciding the precise point at which the development of historical material reaches its final stage as "history", and beyond which, therefore, further development is no longer the historian's concern. Beyond some point it is improper for the historian to proceed while he still claims to be no more than "historian". What follows the final stage of written history is post-historiographical work, and properly belongs to, or comes to form itself, some other discipline. Or, if the historian really is nothing less than a social scientist, it may be that the final point of the sequence, where history is fully a social science, is where at last the historian decisively comes into his own. The result of holding to this position would be that one would be obliged to say that the preceding development of the material of the past is somehow strictly a preparation for this social science of history, and thus properly the work not of the historian but of, for example, the archivist or the annalist. In order to confirm or refute

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3. The ancillary disciplines of history (diplomatics, for example) are borderline cases here. However, they are becoming increasingly specialized and independent; and increasingly the historian simply accepts the results they give him without criticizing those results internally.

such a conclusion, a decisive answer must be made to the question whether the historian should be an archivist, a narrator, a social scientist, or even, perhaps, a philosopher. How is the historian to treat man's past?

Behind any suggestion that history should be concerned with the general rather than with the particular, or with the particular rather than with the general, there is always a presupposition regarding the nature of the task of the historian. If we are to continue to accept that the historian's basic task is to tell a story, as was asserted above, then it must be shown that certain functions sometimes supposed to be proper to historiography are not in fact compatible with the direct and effective execution of the historian's task.

In deciding the function of the historical account it is important not to be misled by the general statements that frequently occur in actual examples of written history by well-known writers. It is sometimes easy to misapprehend the point of a general remark. Explicit general conclusions such as the following are to be found quite regularly in a piece of history:

> There are to-day on the plains of India and China men and women, plague-ridden and hungry, living lives little better, to outward appearance, than those of the cattle that toil with them by day and share their places of sleep by night. Such Asiatic standards, and such unmechanized horrors, are the lot of those who increase their numbers without passing through an industrial revolution.[4]

To end a book in this way (as Ashton does) can be very

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4. T. S. Ashton: The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830 (London, 1948), 161.

deceptive philosophically. Of course, the point of Ashton's book is not to substantiate a general statement like "Population growth without technological development leads to conditions of serious general poverty". The last passage is given only to stress one main thesis of the book, that in the nineteenth century England, on the whole, dealt satisfactorily with the problem of an increasing population because she had passed through an industrial revolution.

A general point may also be implicit in a passage of history, as in the following example, in which there can be understood some such generalization as "In a situation where two races come into conflict, extermination of one race by another leads afterwards to the advocacy of international fraternization by the exterminating race".

> If ... the Germans had succeeded in exterminating their Slav neighbours, as the Anglo-Saxons in North America succeeded in exterminating the Indians, the effect would have been what it has been on the Americans: the Germans would have become advocates of brotherly love and international reconciliation.[5]

I should mention that this passage is very close to being an example of another frequently occurring type of historical generalization, and a type, again, which is deceptive in its generality. However, a treatment of those general statements -- mock laws, as I call them -- which have no empirically determined basis but rest rather on intuitive attitudes of the historian, and which look delusively very much like covering laws with an explanatory purpose but

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5. A. J. P. Taylor: The course of German history (London, 1945), 15.

are not laws at all, together with a discussion of their importance in the historical narrative and their significance for the historian's individuality in his work, must be left until later.[6]

3. Restricted generalizations

Ideally history is a simple account or narrative with a certain explanatory content; and, in the first instance, it must deal with individual events. However, a historical narrative does not on this account come to exclude from its content limited generalizations (holistic particulars and colligatory concepts), or generalizations which are still specifically restricted in some way, or even full generalizations (general laws and principles).

Limited generalizations, referring to holistic particulars or collective entities, such as those that occur in the following passage, are very much an integral and central part of history proper, as I intend to show in a later chapter.

> The late-Victorians seem to have been no keener to rule and develop Africa than their fathers. The business man saw no greater future there, except in the south; the politician was as reluctant to expand and administer a tropical African empire as the mid-Victorians had been; and plainly Parliament was no more eager to pay for it. British opinion restrained rather than prompted ministers to act in Africa. Hence they had to rely on private companies or colonial governments to act for them. It is true that African lobbies and a minority of imperialists did what they could to persuade government to advance. Yet they were usually too weak to be decisive.

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6. See below, chap. VIII, sect. 3.

> Measured by the yardstick of official thinking, there was no strong political or commercial movement in Britain in favour of African acquisitions.[7]

This limited generalization acts as a conclusion or a summing-up of part of the gist of the book as a whole. But a historian's conclusion need not always be the culmination of an argument: generalizing in a limited way may be functionally important in the development of the historian's argument itself, as could be maintained about the following passage.

> The essence of the spirit of the thirties was not apathy but inertia: an incorrigible immobilisme in State and society, a structural resistance to change, and especially to any radical improvement. Far from being apathetic, opinion of many kinds was exasperated and despondent, made so by repeated experience of inability to impose any effective control either on policies or on the sheer course of events. Consciences were deeply stirred, but they could find no outlet in constructive action. The sense of helplessness and drift that resulted may explain the escapist flavour of the most fashionable cults. What appealed most was "getting away from it all".[8]

As I have said, generalizations like these are an important part of true history; but a further, more detailed examination of them, together with an analysis of their nature, must be put by for the moment.[9]

The type of limited general statement of which examples have been given involves a conceptualization of an individual particular as a holistic particular or collective entity. There is another type of restricted

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7. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher: Africa and the Victorians (Garden City, N.Y., 1968), 462.

8. David Thomson: England in the twentieth century (Harmondsworth, 1965), 181.

9. They are treated below, chap. VIII, sect. 2.

generalization where individual events are held to be instances of a single pattern; this is the restricted generalization in the sense of a formulated general rule. These generalizations are quite often to be found in works of history, and particularly in those works that are statistically orientated. How do they relate to the possibility that history is a social science? Can such generalizations be understood to imply that the historian is not really bothered about anything significantly individual or with the particular considered in and for itself, that history is rather concerned with what is at least a restricted or localized generality? In fact, on examination it will be found that true restricted generalizations, although they are in one way a possible stage in the passage to universal generalizations, are functionally important and complete when their proper position in history is defined and elaborated.

The following passage, which is not too obviously statistical, is a good example of a restricted generalization that is put forward with the status of some sort of historical law about causes and effects.

> Within these decades [58 BC - AD 107] every barbarian uprising in Europe followed the outbreak of war either on the eastern frontiers of the Roman empire or in the "Western Regions" of the Chinese. Moreover, the correspondence in events was discovered to be so precise that, whereas wars in the Roman East were followed uniformly and always by outbreaks on the lower Danube and the Rhine, wars in the eastern T'ien Shan were followed uniformly and always by outbreaks on the Danube between Vienna and Budapest.10

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10. F. J. Teggart: Rome and China (Berkeley, Calif., 1939), vii; quoted by Haskell Fain: "History and science", History and Theory, 9 (1970), 154.

In fact, it may not be clear that, as it stands, this passage is intended to state a general relation of cause and effect; but, from what Teggart says elsewhere in his book, it does seem to be meant as a type of general statement of regularity and relationship. He claims that correlations are 'historical facts' and 'of great significance'.[11] Indeed, the relation in the events described is of the form 'such that when the first occurred (in the T'ien Shan or the Roman East), the second occurred (on the Pannonian Danube or the lower Danube and the Rhine), and that, when the first did not occur, the second did not occur', but the correlation is also a co-relation: 'it becomes evident that the events in Asia and Europe are co-related'.[12] The barbarian invasions are asserted to have been 'occasioned' by wars in the Chinese border regions; and the correlation given by Teggart is an example of how 'in the ancient world causes were followed uniformly by effects'.[13]

Clearly Teggart's statement is not a general law; but it usefully demonstrates in what way a restricted generalization, however rigorous it may be in itself, is by its nature inadequate as a law. Despite apparent aspirations, through the precision of its correlations, to seem "scientific" in form, in Teggart's presentation it is not in any sense a general law. If it is like anything

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11. Teggart: op. cit., viii.

12. Ibid.; 239.

13. Ibid., 244.

in the physical sciences, it must be deemed to resemble, for example, the summing-up in an account of a series of experiments. A general law in the physical sciences must be more than a summary of a complete finite set of actual occurrences, more, that is, than a description of a purely concrete, constant regularity in an actual limited set of individual events: it must be a formulation of a certain state of affairs or a statement about certain conditions in the world that is, ceteris paribus, valid for all times and all places.[14] Similarly, in the social sciences a general law must be more than a summary of a limited set of events: it must make a statement having a universal validity. If history were unreservedly to be a social science, it would have to meet this requirement about general laws, and its own laws would not be permitted to carry restrictions regarding a particular region or a particular period, and still be considered as "laws".

How exactly is it that the above example of a generalizing statement does not attain the status of a law? An answer may be sketched in terms such as these: a law in the fullest sense must not refer to any specific region (the Roman Empire) or any specific period (the first century BC and the first century of our own era) as in fact Teggart's statement does. If a generalization is to have the status of a true general law, such references

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14. Cf. Stephen Toulmin: The philosophy of science (London, 1953), passim. Toulmin distinguishes between the abstract, formal statement of a general law or principle and empirical generalizations (or historical reports about the discovered scope of a general law).

to the particular must be removed. We could make an attempt to write such a generally valid law. Since precise descriptions omitting specific references would obviously be unwieldy in this instance, we could formulate some such law in what would naturally be a makeshift, but not necessarily disallowable, fashion. It would begin, perhaps: "In conditions like those existing in Europe between 58 BC and AD 107 every uprising by peoples like (that is, corresponding in significant respects to) the barbarians in Europe at that time follows the outbreak on certain (specified) frontiers of an empire like the Roman Empire at that time, or in certain (specified) regions like the Chinese T'ien Shan at that time." The statement would continue by making many relevant qualifications to this first form of a general law. In other words, if we intend to formulate a law, we shall have to give a restricted generalization rather like Teggart's, and then say, with many qualifications, that in conditions similar to the ones outlined, parallel events will occur.

Nevertheless, what sort of practically satisfactory general law could a procedure like this produce? What can it mean to talk of conditions "like" those in Europe between 58 BC and AD 107? How are we to know which features of a historical event to pick out as the ones that matter in this regard? Questions like these raise the problem of the "relevant aspects" (as I call them) of a situation. However, the relevant aspects that a historian finds in a situation are used by him with an explanatory function

given meaning by the whole structure of his individual understanding of his subject. Discussion of this problem must therefore properly be left until I come to treat the nature of understanding in history.

4. The place of generalizations in history

We may say that Teggart's statement quoted in the last section is a generalization referring to a number of barbarian uprisings that took place over a considerable period of years. The number of uprisings (an exhaustive total) that took place in these years, and examined and made use of by Teggart, is in fact forty. That the study from which the general statement was made was exhaustive is not pertinent to a consideration of its status as a real generalization or general law. We could say that, for Teggart's general statement to be true, it would have to be the case that if evidence for another barbarian uprising around the Danube came to light, concurrent conditions of the uprising would have to correspond with the conditions stipulated by the statement. In this case there is obviously a certain possibility, perhaps only a small one, but all the same a very real one, that historians, or archaeologists, or classicists will discover that there occurred between the years 58 BC and AD 107 a barbarian uprising in Europe that was unknown to Teggart and his sources. If all the circumstances of the uprising were found to agree with Teggart's thesis, then it would

still be agreed that his general statement was true. In fact, through this new example, it would receive further confirmation: it would be further verified as a true statement about the general condition of Rome and the surrounding regions at a certain period, and as a true generalization. Although we would not describe it as a law, we could still accurately describe it as a historical generalization, referring to features of specific past facts that are already known.

A historical generalization is about known facts of the past and nothing more; a law not only refers to known facts, but also makes claims about the unknown. From empirical generalizations nothing can be deduced about counter-factual statements or about future counter-instances. One can imagine that archaeologists from another civilization in the future, unfamiliar in some ways with various aspects of the culture of the Christian era, might formulate it as a "law" that buildings appearing to serve a certain religious function, which were called "churches", are always oriented in a certain geographical direction. This they would have deduced from the results of their excavations. We today know it to be the general "rule" merely, for there are exceptions, that the sanctuary of churches is in the east. When the archaeologists of the future eventually come across one of those few churches of which the (traditional) east end is not the (real) east end (and, given the frequency of the actual occurrence of such churches as we know it, it could be some considerable

time before they did come across one), they could well be thoroughly puzzled; yet, because of their misapprehension of their general "rule" as a full "law", they might deny that this building could have been a church at all despite its apparent similarity of form to previously discovered churches.

In fact there are two possible ways of understanding Teggart's statement: we may understand it as a scientific generalization, or as a generalizing historical statement. If we examine the consequences of looking at it in each of the two ways possible, we should take note of one important characteristic not shared by the historical statement and the scientific statement. This difference is to be found in the differing significance, on the one hand, of the result of the invalidation of the historical generalizing statement, and, on the other hand, of the result of the invalidation of the scientific generalization. Thus, outward invalidation through the discovery of a counter-instance (that is, one which could not be satisfactorily explained away -- for example, either by having special features of its own, or because new attendant conditions had some effect) would have a different significance in the two instances. A statement which begins "All but one of the uprisings in Europe between 58 BC and AD 107 ..." is no longer wholly a "pure" generalization, for, with an unqualified exception included, even the possibility of discovering the general principle relevant to the situation seems to have been abandoned; and if more than one set of

events in conflict with the general statement is discovered, the generalization may soon cease to be a worthwhile statement of probability, and may be of little use eventually even as a "guide" for the social scientist. One instance alone, with no relevant mitigating explanation, is enough to ruin any claim by the statement to universality and to the status of a full, certain generalization, if this is understood to mean a statement in which, hopefully, a general principle of uniformity of some kind is embodied empirically; Teggart, it should be remembered, claimed that causes were followed uniformly by effects in the ancient world. The same statement considered as one involving generalizing on the part of the historian, will probably be less impressive with one, or more than one, counter-instance to be taken into consideration, but, from the point of view of historical knowledge, it will be almost equally interesting and of almost equal importance and usefulness; and, with account taken of exceptions, it is still historically important and useful precisely because the historian is not concerned to come up with hard-and-fast generalizations in his work. A rough generalization is still satisfactory for historical purposes because the historian is still dealing with what is logically particular, for example, the collective entity of the Roman Empire.

It has been pointed out by several writers that such generalizations (here including general laws) as those putatively allowed to history do not require the complete

absence of counter-instances in order to retain their validity; that is to say, considered only on the level of the individual and particular (the level of instantiation), law-like statements in history stipulate no more than a probability or a tendency. Hempel, for one, came in his later writings to emphasize the satisfactoriness of statements of probability as explanations.[15] Thus the power of prediction that is held by some thinkers to be necessary to the concept of explanation enables the foretelling of only a probable outcome rather than the certain outcome of an event. There are intended to be, perhaps, certain prima facie similarities between the laws of history and the laws of physics, where events on the macroscopic level can be formulated with certainty according to general laws and principles, while the microscopic or sub-microscopic events that constitute them can only be the subject of statements of probability. Or, in another fashion, it may be intended that historical laws are seen as analogous to those of heredity in biology, where, regarding the frequency of their occurrence, the characteristics to be distributed among a large number of future plants or animals can be stated with a high degree of accuracy, although nothing of that sort can be predicted about any actual future individual. Or again, as relevant here we may recall the well-known example of marriage statistics, where accurate explanatory statements

15. Compare "The function of general laws in history", Journal of Philosophy, 39 (1942), with the title essay of Aspects of scientific explanation and other essays (New York, 1965); this book also contains a revised version of the first paper.

and predictions can be made about annual totals (including references to general explanatory concepts), while nothing can be said about the possible or likely behaviour of many individuals.

Such analogies as these are, in their import, directly contrary to the central conception of the subject-matter of history. What is important for much historical work is precisely individual behaviour; so much historical work concerns particulars that, if there are going to be laws used and formulated in history and held to be part of the very core of that subject, those laws must have an absolute and certain reference to individuals (or other historical particulars) and not simply to the tendencies of individuals, reserving accuracy for a historically macroscopic level. If it is maintained that covering laws are both central to history and can be satisfactorily about probabilities, then it will have to be held too that the historian's final attention is to be given principally to the general and only subsidiarily to the particular, since, with the use of probable general laws, statements about particular hard-and-fast facts and the explanation of past events may often prove to be false. The central concern of history with the individual and particular is the reason that one counter-instance does in fact invalidate a general historical law.

In conclusion it may be said that the statement of Teggart's about certain correspondences between the events occurring in the Roman Empire and those occurring in the

Chinese empire should be phrased less severely and regarded as a simple generalizing statement about particulars and not as a real (scientific) generalization. With regard to the dichotomy of the particular and the general in the consideration of history and its purposes, it is a historical statement about the particular; and it is a statement about the historically particular because it can be understood to be about holistic particulars. For example, Teggart's statement can be understood either as describing a condition of a certain particular entity (namely, the Roman Empire and its sphere of influence), or as stating what was going on in a particular region during a restricted period of history in purely summary form.

5. History as a social science

Generalization may also be a result of historical work in the form of the full general law. As their highest-level generalization the social sciences have the general law or principle, and the establishment of general principles is ideally one of their chief aims. However, few general laws have definitely been established in the social sciences; and most established general statements take the form of generalizations including one or more specified elements.

A social science is intended to give its workers scope to work with generalizations and (at its highest level) within a general, abstract scheme. History does

make use of generalizations, including the generalizations of the social sciences, but it does not do so exclusively, and it does not regard the general as the highest level it may attain itself. A social science also works towards the establishment of generalizations and general laws, and this history for the most part does not do, although it may make a generalization "in passing", so to speak, and, more often, it may make remarks -- "mock laws" -- that have the appearance of (but are not) general laws or "scientific" generalizations.

Historians are primarily involved in a treatment of the particular. To talk of history as concerning single and individual events, persons, institutions, and so forth, does not mean that history can only be a matter of annalistic or archival work and nothing more. History must in fact be more than this. Full generalizations need not be excluded from historical accounts; however, they do have a different relationship with history proper from the sort of generalization which naturally belongs to history -- the use of holistic particulars and colligatory concepts, or the generalizing statement like Teggart's already cited. All the same, history is not concerned primarily with the general, because the purpose of history is to tell us about the past as such, the past that actually happened. General statements, that is to say, full "scientific" general laws and generalizations, are not concerned with the past alone, or with the past as such; once they have been formulated, they relate as much to the present and the

future, and even to the hypothetical, as they do to the past. It is true that many general laws have their origin and rationale in the past, but, with respect to their theoretical intent, this is something that is purely incidental.

If the ultimate purpose of history were to formulate general laws regarding human behaviour, it could not be interested in the past as such. It must be understood that we cannot talk of "general historical laws" as some special and distinct body of general laws; if genuine laws of this type did exist, they would have to be "general laws of human behaviour in the past" or their equivalent. Yet, in so far as they would be general laws about behaviour in the past, their very reference to the past would preclude their being true general laws, for it would mean that no validity was being claimed for them with regard to the present and the future. General laws are valid for the past, the present, and the future, since they cannot take account of time that is merely relative to the observer. Any "historical" character they may claim can be of no account for their theoretical status. Both in fact and in theory general laws must tell us not about the past as such, which is the subject of history, but about certain sorts of human social behaviour, which will of course include, but not exclusively or essentially, past behaviour. Indeed, to fulfil its task in a proper way, any new science of history, as a social science concerned with the general, would be fully justified in its activity of

formulating laws and other generalizations if it looked for its primary evidence in many other fields than the historical past. If this were the case, a "historian" would be compelled to study, for example, not only contemporary events but also future plans and predictions as matters ancillary to his historical studies and, more importantly, as genuine focal points of interest for historical study itself.

I have shown elsewhere that history is concerned to present a true account of past events. That is its principal and, when necessary, pre-emptive purpose as it should be manifested in any individual historical narrative. If other purposes are involved in any actual work of history they may in their own way be fully acceptable purposes; nevertheless they are not necessary to, or inherent in, the narrative work in its historical aspect, that is to say, they do not help the historian to give a more truthful account of the past. Ultimately, therefore, such purposes must be considered extra-historical. It is because of this fundamental concern of the historian with the truth about the past that we can say that it is no part of the historian's work to set about proving, for example, any sociological, or political, or economic thesis that is not bound specifically to some limited temporal or spatial context -- to the history of some period or region, or to the comparative histories of some particular periods or regions. In any case, it is not inherent in the nature of history that it should be a discipline with

a function secondary to any social science. For the betterment of human knowledge there is an obligation to consider the past in its own right, and therefore history, and historical knowledge, must be esteemed equally with other social disciplines and their knowledge.

6. History and the social sciences

I have said that historians need not concern themselves with non-historical theories of the social sciences; that is to say, the individual historian should not concern himself with these theories in their own right. Yet obviously he must be interested in them as an aid to his own understanding of history; and if it should so happen that in his historical research a historian discovers a particular theory of the social sciences to be proved wrong, then clearly it would be an obligation on his part to point this fact out publicly. All the same, it is no concern of his to set out deliberately to prove or to disprove any genuine theory of the social sciences, as if to do this were itself a real historical activity.

By reason of the nature of their subject-matter -- human affairs -- the social sciences have a considerable and important bearing on written history. A more difficult question regarding any intrinsically historical character possessed by the social sciences concerns those hypotheses and theories of the social sciences that do have a historical context and are, in fact, generalizations

about historical facts. If the historian believes that he should concern himself with these, it must be with regard to their historical truth, or with regard to how far the assertions made by social scientists are actually borne out by historical facts. If he does look at theories of the social sciences, he will do so from the point of view of history and not from the point of view of the social sciences themselves: in other words, his purposes in looking at the historical aspects of theories in the social sciences will include, for example, the intention that historians (and others) should not be misled, rather than that social scientists should be corrected. The historian as such should not concern himself with the internal value of general statements for the social sciences, or with attempts to formulate the ultimate, hoped-for generalizations and general principles that some social scientists are seeking.

Historical generalizations in the social sciences do bear some resemblance to the passage of Teggart's previously cited. The historical generalization of this form differs from the generalization of a social science in so far as the first may be considered, logically, as an end in itself and indeed, from the point of view of historiographical theory, should be treated as a statement about the historically particular. In its function it may be an end in itself, or a means to the establishment of some similar general statement, that is to say, a historical statement on the same logical level, or it may take on the

role purely of one step in an argument about particulars. In the social sciences, however, a historically restricted type of statement like Teggart's must surely only be a stopping-place in the formulation of a higher generalization, or, alternatively, it must be a practical derivation from a general law (of a higher logical order) that has already been formulated.

The individual historian is concerned to describe and explain specific and particular events in the past. History is about the individual and particular; and it cannot be considered a social science without a change in the definition of its subject-matter, nature, and purpose. Nevertheless, in his efforts towards a greater understanding of past events the historian can, and should, make use of the findings of the social sciences, just as, for example, among other disciplines, he makes use of the discoveries of the physical sciences. Even so, it is important for the historian to differentiate between using the findings of the social sciences and using the methods of the social sciences, for these methods have not been evolved for the purpose of dealing with the particular for its own sake. Yet to say this is not to say that the methods of the social sciences should never be used by the historian: in the appropriate circumstances they may be of relevant practical value for historical work, but without being in any way the historian's primary methods. And it should be remembered that although the historian, as a historian, does not add directly or immediately to the findings, or

theories, or conclusions of the social sciences, he may yet supply the social scientist with important data. Of course we must always bear in mind what Bury wrote:

> [H]istory supplies the material for political and social science. This is a very important function; but, if it were the only function, if the practical import of history lay merely in furnishing examples of causes and effects, then history, in respect of practical utility, would be no more than the handmaid of social science.[16]

We must remember that history is a discipline in its own right, with its own standards and its own aims.

Although as a whole the historian's methodology may not be a satisfactory one after the manner of the methodology claimed by political science or economics or sociology, he may certainly be contributing, by means of his proper historical work, to the development of the social sciences. It is certainly better that history should contribute indirectly to the social sciences and retain its disciplinary independence, than that it should attempt itself to become a full social science -- a state that it could only achieve imperfectly and to the disadvantage of its true subject-matter.

The historian may well make use of the social sciences in order to deepen his understanding of the processes at work in societies, for these are the processes at work in history. He understands these processes as consequences of particular historical events. In appropriate connections he may also make use both of any of

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16. J. B. Bury: "History as a science", in Varieties of history, ed. Fritz Stern (London, 2nd ed., 1970), 214.

of the empirical findings and of any of the theoretical principles of the social sciences that he considers suitable in order to formulate and justify his own descriptions and explanations of specific historical actions, events, and situations. Although history itself is by no means a social science, the profitable use of the work of the social scientist is unquestionably a legitimate part of historiographical procedure; but it must always be emphasized that in relation to historical work as written history the general character of the various social sciences, as that is shown in what they offer to history, is ancillary to the particular character of history proper. For the historian it is not the particular historical event that is somehow auxiliary to the proofs and theories of the social sciences.

7. Conclusion

What I have said in this chapter may seem to have rather a remote connection with the problem of objective history and the individual historian. However, it must be made quite clear that the subject-matter of history is the particular and not the general. So long as it may be thought that historians are concerned primarily with generalizations and general principles and their instantiation in the past, that history is, or should be, a social science, much of what I have to say in the next chapters on explanation and understanding, and on history as a form

of literature, might be disbelieved, for it is necessarily dependent on the thesis that a very large part of history is particular and complex and not general and analysable in a scientific way.

Before proceeding with a discussion of explanation and understanding, a brief recapitulation of what I have said about the place of generalizations in history may be in order. The particular and an account of the particular are always present at some stage in investigations of the past of man. A subservience to general principles would destroy history as such, for a complete generality must destroy temporal reference and thus eliminate precisely the past character of history -- that character which makes history what it is. Lower-order generalizations and generalizing statements must be understood differently according as they are meant for historical work, or as a stage towards a better general law, in which case their importance will derive not from their reference to past facts but from their presentation of empirical evidence that may be used to support or construct a general theory. When historical generalizations only state probabilities the intrinsic significance of any actual historical particular is again disregarded: in this case no claim is made that the generalization will be found to apply to <u>any actual particular</u>. In short, history cannot be about the past as such at the same time as it is thought of as a generalizing activity. Of course, limited generalizations, of holistic particulars or colligatory concepts, are quite

a different case: logically they are still about particulars, and they still have a full and unequivocal reference to a particular "piece" of the past.

The point I have tried to make about general principles, general laws and generalizations is not that they have no place in historical work (for they do), but that historical work cannot be defined exclusively in terms of the general. History is the story of <u>past</u> events, and it is plain that to provide us with a true story of these events it must deal primarily with the particular. In the following two chapters I intend to make clear the significance of the particular in historical explanation and understanding.

VII

EXPLANATION

1. Three types of historical explanation

Ever since history began to be written, from the first historical accounts of Herodotus and Thucydides down to the present day, the function of the historian has been conceived as the ascertaining of what happened in the past and the relating of past events in such a way that the reader may see not only what happened but also why it happened. Through the changing conceptions of the nature and purpose of history the task of the historian has been seen as the description and explanation of the past. In their examination of the past historians, unlike social scientists, are not primarily oriented towards particular types of human behaviour but rather towards actual instances of thought and action. Because of this concern with the concrete instance, which for the historian, of course, has the final character not of a mere instance, as of some greater class, but of an event which has a full existence in and for itself, the historian must explain events but must also proceed even beyond simple explanation. Explanation alone may easily remain a cold and sterile abstraction, leaving the facts of history dead for the reader and the historical events narrated devoid of their essential qualities -- their human aspect and their

existence as part of a greater and more understandable whole. The greatest task of the historian is to impart to his reader historical understanding. The isolated and objective factual explanation must regain its historicity and human quality by being integrated into a meaningful whole; only through the integration that underlies the historical understanding of the whole can discrete historical facts and explanations come to form what is truly and completely a piece of written history, a historical account.

The problem of historical understanding must be left for treatment in the next chapter. It is necessary to examine first some problems of historical explanation, since explanatory statements form a part of historical understanding, and are determined by and contribute to the individual interpretation of a particular historian.

Explanation in history does not conform to any single pattern. It is probably true to say that there are as many types of satisfactory historical explanation as there are types of explanation in everyday life. Certainly all types of explanation are found in the works of historians, and are accepted in their own right when they form the basis of a historical discussion; that is to say, in criticizing another historian's argument no historian ever disallows a proffered explanation on the ground that it is of a logical type unacceptable in historical work. For example, a historian does not reject some rational explanation of an event just because it is a <u>rational</u> explanation.

(Of course, he may feel that the rational explanation requires supplementing in other terms; but that is a different matter.) Historical explanations are criticized internally, and their schematic terms are inevitably accepted, although arguments that are intended to contradict or amplify them may take other logical forms.

In an attempt to achieve a certain simplicity of exposition, my treatment of explanation will be confined to a brief survey of three rather basic and clearly defined forms: rational explanation, covering-law explanation, and "explanation how".[1] Each of these types of explanation has been held by different thinkers to provide the basis for a proper logical understanding of explanation in history; the first two types have been especially emphasized by philosophers, while "explanation how" has been the particular favourite of historians for, supposedly, providing the key conception of what they do when they explain something. It should be noted that there are other forms of explanation that could easily be defined: teleological explanation, explanation in terms of speculative theories, and (as it may be called) the "accident theory" of history, which, although it offers genuine explanations of events, offers none that are historically significant or worthwhile, are examples that spring readily to mind.[2] However, since I am not concerned to examine

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1. Cf. R. F. Atkinson: "Explanation in history", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, n.s. 72 (1971-72).

2. These are intrinsically more disputatious forms of explanation: teleological forms of explanation may be

explanation in its own right or for its own sake, the first three types, which are in any case the most commonly discussed, will provide a sufficient indication of what the historian can be doing when he is said to be explaining something.

That I intend to offer no intensive criticism of the explanation-models offered by philosophers of history may appear to be a serious shortcoming. But the subject of this dissertation does not require any extensively detailed internal criticism of the forms of historical explanation. For the most part internal criticism of various theories of historical explanation seems to be intended either to facilitate an acceptance of a theory as universally valid for actual examples of history or as prescriptively valid for historians, or to refute that theory altogether. I am concerned neither to advance any one theory as universal nor to refute it. My claim is only that each theory of explanation correctly describes some actual instances of satisfactory explanation in history. Therefore all that the next few pages attempt to do is to give in outline the nature of historical explanation and to substantiate satisfactorily claims that no one form of historical explanation offers a complete description of what historians do when they explain something.

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reducible to other forms; speculative history seems to involve explanation of another "higher" order (e.g., the theological); the "accident theory" of history will give standard explanations of many events, but will also suggest that many events happened, really, by chance, or emphasize simply that things happened in one way rather than another.

Explanation in history is very much an open-textured concept, in some respects like the familiar philosophical example of "game". Perhaps the most that can be said of it in general is that it supplies a justification for the historian's statement of some fact in terms that answer the question "Why?" ("Because of what?" or "For what reason or motive?" or "To what end?") or "How?" ("Through what circumstances?" or "In what way?"), or a justification in terms that appeal to the characteristics of a holistic particular or colligatory concept.[3] To show that historical explanation is not a closed concept it will be necessary to demonstrate how each single form of explanation is not a satisfactory way of describing all that goes on under the description of historical explanation.

The covering-law theory of explanation, as that is applied to history, is one that is discussed frequently and intensively by philosophers at the present time.[4] There can be no dispute that the theory is certainly applicable in many cases, and that historians, whether knowingly or not, do make use of covering laws in their explanations or give explanatory accounts which can be represented or re-interpreted in ways that conform to the covering-law model. However, historical explanations are not all of one single type, either overtly or potentially

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3. Holistic particulars and colligatory concepts belong rather to the concept of understanding than to the concept of explanation. See below, chap. VIII, sect. 2.

4. The discussion starts, of course, with the paper by Carl G. Hempel, "The function of general laws in history", Journal of Philosophy, 39 (1942).

(through analysis), and the covering-law theory gives an adequate description of only one sort of explanation. W. B. Gallie, in Philosophy and the historical understanding,[5] provides a clear exposition of why the covering-law theory cannot give a complete account of all satisfactory historical explanations. His arguments may be summarized in the following way.[6] Firstly, because historical situations cannot be reproduced experimentally, it often cannot be decided whether a law applies exactly to a situation. Secondly, in order to get laws to apply in a situation, it is frequently necessary for a historian to hypothesize an unobserved or unrecorded factor in the situation he is trying to explain. Thirdly, many covering-law explanations turn out on examination to be indicative merely of the necessary conditions, rather than the sufficient conditions, of the explicandum. And fourthly, many explanations only remind us that 'a particular action is quite in keeping with what we know of the behaviour and purposes and standards of the agent, and perhaps of his age and circle as well'.[7] The case against the consideration of covering-law explanations as the type of explanation in

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5. (London, 1964).

6. It should be noted that in the way he discusses the historian's application of covering laws, Gallie constantly seems to be supposing that, if the historian did use them, his generalizations would be made in an easily observable fashion. This is comparatively rarely the case when the historian does make use of covering laws; such laws are usually deeply embedded in his account, or in the thinking behind the account, and may often only be recovered with some difficulty and labour.

7. Cf. Gallie: op. cit., 105-107.

history is made very well. Since covering-law theorists have not yet, and indeed would not be able to have, overcome the objections that are raised above, and since these objections have their origin in history as it actually is, and as it must be treated, the arguments must stand: notwithstanding the fact that covering-law theory can account for an important proportion of explanations in history, it does not supply us with a complete account of all historical explanations.

Covering laws are not uncommonly used both explicitly and implicitly in explanation by historians. Criticism of the covering-law position as presenting a complete picture of explanation in history has led unfortunately to an equally untenable, extreme, opposed position. Donagan, for example, writes:

> The most striking fact about the Popper-Hempel theory is that few of the innumerable historical explanations found in the writings of historians even appear to accord with it. Of the few that are ... put forward [as resting on covering laws] I shall argue that the putative covering laws they contain are either spurious or untrue.[8]

This argument of Donagan's comes in the end to rest on the mistake of believing that everything in history is a matter of rationally explicable behaviour. Covering laws may at least adequately explain the effects of natural events in history. Natural catastrophes, for example, usually have considerable historical significance and need to be explained (as to their initial results for human life) scientifically. And covering laws may also not infrequently

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8. Alan Donagan: "The Popper-Hempel theory reconsidered", in Philosophical Analysis and History, ed. William H. Dray (New York, 1966), 142.

be able to provide a successful account of rational actions without the direct intervention of rational explanation proper.

The theory of rational explanation has found its most recent complete statement in W. H. Dray's Laws and explanation in history.[9] Dray's position is basically that historical explanations tell the reader what the rationale (in the end in terms of the individual) of historical actions was. Or rather, his position is that rationality is not the only basis of the historian's explanations, but it is the source of that type of explanation which is characteristically historical. To say that rational explanations are characteristic of history and not in some way essential to history successfully avoids the rather strong conclusions about the final subject-matter of history of thinkers like Collingwood.[10] However, in actuality they are only characteristic of history in so far as part of the subject-matter of history consists of the ambitions, intentions, attitudes and so forth of individuals. Where such matters figure largely in a narrative (as happens frequently in history), it is natural that many explanations will be couched in the same sort of terms. For ordinary purposes we expect the explicans to be of the same nature as the explicandum: where the two have different natures we shall find ourselves presented with a specialized treatment of a subject, such as that to be

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9. (Oxford, 1957).

10. See above, chap. III, sect. 3.

found in a psychoanalytic biography. Rational explanations are no more characteristic of history as such than this -- that a very large part of the historian's subject-matter is concerned with rational actions, and so naturally finds the explanations of these in similar, related terms. They may be used where the historian thinks them appropriate and helpful (and naturally, where he believes them to be genuinely explanatory), and where, given the way we usually look at human actions, we should normally expect, and be satisfied by, an explanation of the rational type. So many historical events are open to a wholly or largely non-rational explanation, however, that it would be better not to describe rational explanations as "characteristic" of history, since the use of such a word suggests a certain primacy for that sort of explanation, as if, for example, a rational explanation was only to be put to one side or overruled in cases where it was clearly unacceptable or impossible to formulate acceptably, or as if rational action as such were to be identified as the true subject-matter of history. Rational explanations are not the only sort of historical explanation, nor are they the principal sort, nor even primus inter pares (as characteristic of historical explanation). They are only one sort of explanation open to the historian's use, and the historian will use rational explanation when he believes that it provides the most satisfactory account of whatever it is he has to explain. Naturally, the incidence of rational explanations will vary between the narratives of one historian and those

of another. If rational explanation predominates in, or is almost entirely absent from, a particular narrative, this will not be an indication that it is characteristic, or uncharacteristic, of history: it will rather be a mark of the historian's own philosophy of life, and how it is that he thinks human actions and everyday events in general (not just in history) are to be explained. The type of explanation chosen -- the extent, for example, to which rational explanation predominates over causal explanation -- will tend to be a consequence of the historian's own world-view or philosophical standpoint. It will be an expression of the historian's own attitude about, among other problems, how valid, or effective, or meaningful a person's reasons for his actions really are. But this point I shall develop more extensively below.[11]

One practical point that can count against an unhesitating adoption of rational explanation in history needs to be mentioned here: it is that explanations in terms of rationality can most readily lead to factual error on the part of the historian. For example, an agent's ambitions for the most part have to be deduced from evidence; rarely does the historian meet an explicit documentary statement like "My aims in this matter are such-and-such." The historian has to gather what a man's ambitions were from what other people said about him, or, even more commonly, from what the man did and the way in which he did it, and from what actually happened and similar very

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11. See sect. 3.

indirect evidence. If the historian is interested in the most acceptable and most satisfactory explanation available, he will be little inclined to pursue one sort of explanation to a point where his conclusions seem doubtful, but will give his explanation as far as possible in terms of the material evidence that is available. Explanatory reconstruction of rational factors in historical events from indirect evidence is very often correct. However, if the historian wishes to formulate rational explanations of events and actions to the greatest extent possible, from evidence of a non-rational type he may be led to postulate plausible statements of rational explanation which -- however likely -- nevertheless have no factual support and may be quite untrue. Rational explanations are at their best when they are constructed from directly rational evidence. When, for example, hypotheses about rational behaviour are formulated from external evidence of actions the chances are increased that such rational explanations will be both very plausible and quite untrue.[12] The acceptance of false rational explanations can have serious effects for historical research: they may distract other historians in their own work in the same field, and later historians will not only have to prove their own theory about events but will also have to disprove specifically the plausible but false, rational theory.

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12. A good instance is provided by Bryce's explanation of the coronation of Charlemagne in 800; Barraclough totally refutes it and points out that for Charlemagne no idea of assuming the imperial title as 'the most appropriate expression of the "universal" power of the

The third principal type of historical explanation, "explanation how", is the hardest of the three types to define rigorously. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that some historians at least prefer to disregard more contentious theories of explanation, maintaining that as historians they do not provide explanations of events in any strict sense that may be laid down by theorists, but that, when they appear to be explaining something, they are simply providing for their readers a more extensive description of events; that is to say, they give more details of attendant conditions, of significant circumstances that may have had an influence on events, of those aspects of an individual's personality that seem relevant to the way he acted, without ever making an explicit link of "cause" and "effect". Explanation that is offered in terms of more detailed description is one of the factors that goes to make writing a historical narrative a truly literary pursuit; and, given an increasingly detailed description, the reader comes to reach a historical understanding of past events through a grasp of the whole rather than by means of analytic explanations.

Simply because there is no postulation of cause and effect in the historian's "explanation how", the philosopher can hardly consider this type of explanation -- the extended and deepened description -- to be explanation at

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Frankish monarchy, lay behind the events of 800; the imperial crown was not (as Bryce maintained) "the goal towards which the policy of the Frankish kings had for many years pointed".' (The mediaeval empire: idea and reality (London, 1950), 9.)

all from the logical point of view. However, this consideration should not obscure for us the importance of descriptive explanation in history and its significance for both causal and rational explanation. Explaining how is, in many instances, to be seen as that part of the historian's work which leads him from description to explanation. An explanation cannot be formulated unless we have a detailed description of what is to be explained; but the details of that description and their arrangement will already partially determine the explanation that is to be given. And a detailed description without any accompanying explanation (in the strict sense) will in any case suggest to a reader the possible applicability of certain explanations rather than others.

The difficulties which descriptive explanation -- "explanation how" -- can present in practice should not be minimized. Nevertheless, the "how" of an event seems initially less disputatious and somehow more objective and discoverable than the "why" of an event. Some historians, as I have said, would like to halt the development of their work at saying how events took place, presumably thinking to allow the reader to formulate explanations which he will find satisfactory in terms of his own favoured theories or his philosophy of life. More constructively, descriptive explanation can be seen as a bond of comprehension between description and what may be termed explanation proper (causal or rational explanation); it seems to demand this stricter sort of explanation, since that

past events happened in the way that they did rather than in some other way is a fact that requires ultimately to be explained by the historian or by someone else.

The realization of the necessity for saying how past events happened -- which, in some ways, can be seen in itself simply as description -- has the consequence of showing us that pure historical description is inadequate for the full conception of written history, and that the historian's task must inevitably include explanation. The description or explanation of how events came about is, of course, an indispensable part of any intelligible narrative, for it is only in this way that discrete historical facts are linked up. Yet "explanation how" is itself incomplete without "explanation why", in so far as it already presupposes, or contains within itself, causal or rational explanation. That is to say, the historian cannot describe how certain events happened without including in his account descriptive statements that contain implicitly in themselves rational or causal features which should prove to be the sources of possible full rational or causal explanations. It is because of this that descriptive explanation can most usefully be seen as the bridge between description and explanation proper: it presents us with a future explanation, even though any explanation is still implicit in an account that appears to be a simple description of events.

2. The role of explanation in history

Quite clearly many historians see the function of historiography in the historian's telling of a story, believing that any explanation is to be conceived principally in terms of saying how something happened. A. J. P. Taylor, for example, writes:

> What Hexter likes in history is explanation. He argues that every "How?" can be turned into a "Why?" Here, I think, like most historians who try to explain what they are doing, he is forcing a card. He is asserting that the history he likes is History. I favour the sort of history that answers the questions, "What happened next?" and "How did it happen?" The Whys will then look after themselves.[13]

Nevertheless, we must not forget that all historians explain (in a full sense), and some do so extensively. They do not offer explanations only as subsidiary to a general narrative story: some accounts are themselves conceived as explanations of greater or lesser events, and without this explanatory function they would have no point as stories. Genuinely historical accounts have subjects like the causes of the War of Jenkin's Ear, or the causes of the French Revolution, or the origins of the First World War; and topics like these are unquestionably of frequent occurrence in history. Historians do not simply never do more than tell stories, as if telling stories could always be an end in itself.

When attention is focused on the purely narrative aspect of history, it is easy to conceive a historical

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13. Review of The history primer by J. H. Hexter, The Observer, 17 December 1972.

account as a piece of writing that simply tells us the story of what happened and goes no further than description; and it is true that many accounts conform to this conception. Consequently, it is very easy to regard explanation in a historical account as subsidiary to description, and logically as almost an incidental part of the historian's work; reacting perhaps to too much philosophizing about their work by non-historians, historians themselves are sometimes disposed to regard explanations in this light. The clearest philosophical exposition of this view has been put by Gallie.

> Historical understanding is the exercise of the capacity to follow a story, where the story is known to be based on evidence and is put forward as a sincere effort to get at the story so far as the evidence and the writer's general knowledge and intelligence allow. But to follow an historical narrative always requires the acceptance, from time to time, of explanations which have the effect of enabling one to follow further when one's vision was becoming blurred or one's credulity taxed beyond patience.
>
> This, I maintain, is the peculiar and all-important role of explanations in history: they are essentially aids to the basic capacity or attitude of following, and only in relation to this capacity can they be correctly assessed and construed.[14]

Explanation is simply ancillary to a descriptive story; it is not significant in itself, but is to be employed merely as a useful aid towards understanding history (which, for Gallie, means following a descriptive historical narrative). The actual type of explanation the historian uses has no significance within history: the debate, for example, between rational explanations and covering-law

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14. Op. cit., 105. For a criticism of expressions like "the story" (more commonly, "the truth about the past"), see below, chap. VIII, sect. 9.

explanations ceases to be a vitally important one for the discipline of history. Logically, explanations in history may be of a causal or a rational type; nevertheless, what really matters for philosophical discussions of history is the practical function of an explanation as it is found in the narrative. So it is that Gallie writes:

> Once we consider their pragmatic aspect, however, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the characteristic function of explanations in history is an ancillary one. It is, to repeat, to enable us to follow a narrative when we have got stuck, or to follow again more confidently when we had begun to be confused or bewildered. Hence explanations in history, like the explanations we ask for or volunteer to fellow spectators at a game, are in the nature of intrusions: they are not what we primarily came for -- the play, that is the basic thing. Or, in old-fashioned logical parlance, explanation is a proprium of the basic activity of following an historical narrative: but a proprium to whose relative importance or complexity or bulk within any given narrative no a priori limits can be set. This view seems to imply that, unless or until it needs to be "righted" -- as well as logically endorsed -- by a helpful explanation, every historical narrative is, in an appropriate sense, self-explanatory.[15]

If Gallie means us to take literally his statement that explanations are characteristically offered us (in even the most descriptive of histories) when we are 'stuck' or 'confused or bewildered', it can only be said, unfortunately, that this is most certainly not the case. On the one hand, historians offer us explanations in passing all the time; with regard to most of the explanations they provide for their readers, it cannot be said that the narrative would be harder to follow without them, or that confusions are cleared up (or that clearing-up is even attempted) by them. Perhaps it needs to be explicitly

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15. Ibid., 107-108.

noted all the same, of course, that explanations are sometimes offered quite clearly with an elucidatory intention. On the other hand, explanations may often be as bewildering as the events they purport to explain. In some cases they may even be more bewildering. For example, an account of how the First World War started and the general conditions in which it could occur is less bewildering than a full explanation of the actual "causal chain" (within those conditions) which brought it about. At this point it can be said of explanations in history that many of them, but by no means all, are undoubtedly subsidiary or ancillary to the narrative, or story, and serve not at all to clear up confusion but to provide an ever more detailed description and to "deepen the picture". And sometimes explanations occur simply because the historian's natural curiosity leads him to offer an explanation of an event without any commitment of himself thereby to a general theory of the logic or function of explanations in history.

Nevertheless, as I mentioned, explanations are often in the course of an account offered by the historian with, as Gallie says, the purpose of clearing up confusion and to help us to follow the story more easily. The comments Gallie makes on this function of explanation need therefore to be remembered as telling us what the purpose of some explanations is in a historical narrative. Notably,

> the need to explain arises most obviously when the textual critic or the historian is compelled to depart in some marked and important way from the received text or

from the historical interpretation which has been traditionally, or which would be most naturally placed upon it ... whenever he departs from the commonly received account of certain famous events, or whenever his interpretation or assessment of events that he is presenting for the first time runs counter to our natural custom-born expectations and habits of judgment.

... A sense of implausibility in the received account, a suspicion that many possible motives and opportunities for action have hitherto been neglected because of bias or unimaginativeness or both -- such are commonly the beginnings of an historical explanation, which will conclude by endorsing a much more acceptable account of what must have happened.[16]

It must also be made clear, especially when a certain rigour is demanded of the historian's explanations, that the historian's use of explanatory words is often not intended to convey the same intensity of meaning or to claim the same exactness as the scientist's use of those words. Historical explanation is not all that it might seem to be from the language it uses.

As they occur in historical narratives such words as "hence", "thus", "therefore", "because", etc., evidently lack the clarity and fixity of meaning which they possess in formal logic and in the natural sciences. Very often in an historical narrative a "therefore" or a "because" serves simply as an aid to the reader, urging or reminding him to hold together under his attention a succession of incidents which, in fact, need no explanation at all. ... In sum, what appear to be explanatory sentences -- or what might be taken to be such by over-zealous logicians -- can often perfectly well be

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16. Ibid., 114-15. Two incidental points may usefully be noted here: firstly, Gallie does not distinguish between explanations internal to the narrative (e.g., 'A' happened because 'B' happened) and justifications by the historian of an internal explanation (e.g., his statement that he believes that 'A' happened because 'B' happened, because it accords with such-and-such an interpretation). At some points the two explanations shade into each other; at other points they are very far apart and quite unconnected. Secondly, Gallie seems to confuse explanation with interpretation when he suggests that explanation gives us an account of "what" must have happened (rather than "why" or "how" events happened in the way that they did).

> replaced by a number of narrative sentences which no one would dream of regarding as explanations.[17]

Gallie, admittedly, gives a good account of the pragmatic aspects of some historical explanations. Even so, what he says is by no means an exhaustive account of all valid explanations in history, pragmatically or logically. Many historical explanations simply are not found just when we need an aid in following the narrative; reasons for the provision of an explanation in a historical account can be very varied. As Gallie says, an explanation may be given so that we do not get stuck, or lose the sense of the narrative; but it also may be provided, not because the narrative is difficult to follow, but simply because the curiosity that impels a person to find out what happened in the past will also be likely to impel him to find out why it happened. An explanation may be given to place an event, such as a revolution, in its class, in terms of a general law, to show how its causes resembled the causes of other members of its class. One may be furnished to show how an event differed significantly from other members of its class, that is, to show that it is not subsumable under a general law. An explanation may be supplied in order to deepen the historical picture; perhaps of little significance in itself, it will enable the historian to give full details of subsidiary events within the structure of his narrative. Most often in history an explanation will be offered because the description of an

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17. Ibid., 110-11.

action or an event just seems incomplete without an explanation: an event will be puzzling in itself without being problematical as part of a narrative. That, for example, the Labour government devalued the pound in 1949 is an event that, with no explanation offered, I can take in my stride in a historical narrative as it fits into its descriptive context; yet an explanation would normally be expected. Certainly, most persons with an interest in the post-war years would be curious for an explanation, in terms of causes and purposes, personalities and economic factors. Certainly, I expect some sort of explanation from a historian of most events like that; a historian can neglect to explain some events, but he cannot neglect to explain all, even though his reader should remain unconfused. It may be that many explanations have no pragmatic function internal to the historical narrative; it could be the case that there is some inner compulsion in man's nature which leads him to follow the question "What?" with the question "Why?".[18]

Explanation has a different and more functional relationship with some descriptive narratives. The second point to note with regard to what Gallie has said is that

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18. Although it is only of marginal relevance, it may be noted here that American historians are concerned more extensively with explanation than are English historians, both in their practical work and, consequently, in their thinking about their practice. This concern with explanation is certainly one reason that Americans see history as a discipline close to, or even as one of, the social sciences. With a greater concern for historical description of the particular, English historians are readier to see as significant in a historical narrative at least some of the features of other types of literature.

not all historical accounts, especially those of the "monograph" type (which are often examples of "narrative" even in Gallie's narrow sense of a lengthy story with sequential development) but also those of book-length, can be classified simply as descriptive narrative, as Gallie seems to be suggesting. Many historical narratives are not only explanatory in part but also explanatory considered as a whole. As I pointed out above, a history book may well be principally about the causes (or origins) of a historical event like the First World War. Obviously a work with a topic of such scope will seem to be definable as descriptive; and it is most certainly the case that it tells a story. But the point to be made is that the description or the story is not an end in itself; it is not the story of what happened, as a history of the war itself might be. It is thus not a narrative that is complete in itself and needs no external reference: it is the story of why or how something else happened, and in so far as it tells us what happened, this must be seen and can only be understood, and is even only conceptually complete, in relation to something external to the story. The narrative as a whole is -- in the end -- not descriptive but explanatory; in effect, it is a very large-scale explanation. Once it is realized that explanation can figure so largely and so dominantly in historical work, it is no longer possible to hold that explanation in history is an activity of the historian that is <u>primarily</u> a subsidiary one.

I should now make clear what I consider to be the consequences, at least with respect to the individual historian, of what I have said about explanation in history. To sum up, historical explanation may take many forms -- rational, causal, "explanation how", teleological and so forth -- all of which are to be found so frequently in historical narratives and are so regularly accepted by historians that they must all be considered legitimate in history. With Wittgenstein's points about a concept like "game" in mind it should be easier to understand that all instances of a concept, all our uses of one word, need not share a common property. While some examples of "explanation" will have something in common, and any one example must share something with some other examples, any two "explanations" may have nothing in common, except (and perhaps this is not as trivial as it sounds) that we refer to them by the same word.

Historical explanation cannot be defined in terms of one logical form, and it cannot be understood in terms of one single function, such as Gallie's notion that it primarily helps us to follow a story. Written history itself is neither primarily descriptive nor primarily explanatory.

3. The historian's choice of explanation

The multifarious nature of historical explanation, its character and purpose, have considerable consequences

for one of the historian's main tasks, selection.[19] If there were one form of historical explanation recognized as the type of historical explanation, in either logical or functional terms, the historian's methods of selection would at once become much more straightforward and the chances of an immediate attainment of an undisputed objectivity much greater. If historical explanation were understood to be rational explanation, the historian who was seeking to explain some event would know what sort of evidence he was looking for to provide him with material for an explanation: he would above all be looking for factual evidence about the characters of the protagonists, about their motives, ambitions, intentions, about their real place in, and influence on, the course of events. Or, if the historian is obliged to explain things in terms of general laws, if historical explanation is of a scientific, covering-law type, he will again know what he is looking for: seeing an event as a member of a particular class of events, he will know, from his knowledge of general principles believed to be applicable to historical studies, that he is searching for causes of a particular kind, which will provide him with the explanation he wants. Or, if it is not the logical but the functional form of explanation that is significant for history, the historian will know that he must provide that explanation which fulfils its function best: if it is a case of helping

19. The problem of selection has already been discussed in another context above, chap. IV, sect. 2.

the reader to follow a story, the historian will ask himself which explanation will clear up the reader's confusions most effectively.

The necessity of providing any <u>one</u> explanation of a certain type makes the explanation given by the historian one that is open to objective criticism, leaving much less scope for a historian's bias to have a deleterious effect. If explanation in rational terms is demanded, for instance, with the result that the historian says something like "The event X happened because the individual A wanted power", the critic can only ask two questions, "Did A want power?" and "Was A in such a position that what he wanted, and his attempts to attain what he wanted, could influence events?". These questions can be settled by recourse to material evidence and general principles of, among other disciplines, psychology and political theory. (Sometimes it will only be clear in theory how such questions might be settled, since for practical reasons such as insufficiency of evidence they may remain in dispute.)

Once it is granted, however, that satisfactory historical explanation can be of different types, the critic can ask the very complicating third question, "Although it is true that A wanted power and seemed to be in a position to influence events, are A's ambitions a <u>true</u> explanation (or the <u>real</u> explanation) of event X?"[20] Now it is the

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20. The best-known examples of the sort of problem that is involved here are provided by the "great-man" interpretations of history. Some historians quite evidently believe that great men are innately and necessarily exceptional persons; others believe that events make

case, obviously, that on many occasions both in history and in everyday life we cannot answer this question by having recourse to factual evidence or objective principles. It is up to the individual historian to decide which sort of explanation he is to provide according to his own principles (notwithstanding the fact that in many cases the type of explanation that will be expected by his readers is made clear in the kind of subject-matter the historian is studying). The type of explanation which predominates in the work of a particular historian is representative of that individual's own world-view, his own philosophical standpoint. Different types of explanation do not of necessity mutually falsify each other on the level of the particular event: individual explanations find their place within the whole explanatory scheme of the historian. Just as in discussions of the problem of determinism one does not argue the case of free will versus determinism in each particular instance as if there were something actually present in the factual evidence about any instance of behaviour which might help us to solve the question on each occasion (rather, one argues the case in general terms, using particular instances as illustrative), and just as a free-will explanation stands or falls on the

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great men when circumstances are propitious. In a generic way, one can find this difference in point of view existing, for example, between social history and biography. In social history individuals figure only to a small extent and seem in most cases to have their actions, if not dominated, at least determined by events; in biography individuals (of necessity) figure to a large extent and seem unequivocally to be the masters of their actions.

principles underlying it, so a tenable rational explanation of a historical action cannot be set up against an equally tenable covering-law explanation and supported by an appeal to the factual evidence. When an explanation is coherent and factually well-grounded then it can be accepted or rejected only as its underlying principles are accepted or rejected. Even in scientific studies the scientist ultimately decides between explanations that are equally satisfactory according to his own world-view; as Körner has pointed out:

> What is required for a "rational explanation" depends on the scientist's conception of what constitutes a "good" theory -- e.g., that such a theory must be mechanistic, statistical, teleological, etc. These conceptions or attitudes are articulated by normative, regulative or programmatic principles for the construction of theories and are not captured by any analysis of the formal structure of theories and their relations to experience. They are rooted not only in logic and observation, but also in the scientist's view of the world as a whole, i.e., in his metaphysics.[21]

Since no one type of historical explanation is inherently preferable, logically or functionally, for historical work, the type of explanation the historian chooses for any action or event in his account is very much a personal choice of the historian. Sometimes, it is true, the option of choosing between a rational and a causal explanation of the same event will not be open to him, and his choice will be determined by the nature of the factual evidence; very often, however, an explanation will be determined by the historian's own principles, by his ideas about the metaphysical character of man and the world.

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21. Stephan Körner: Fundamental questions of philosophy (Harmondsworth, 1971), 90.

Although in many cases what happened in the past will suggest to the historian the type of explanation that is suitable in a way in which we find one type of explanation rather than another suitable in our present everyday experience, this cannot be the sole determinant of the explanation-type in history. In many instances it will simply not be clear which type of explanation is the one demanded by the context of events; in these cases the type will be determined not by the real past events which are to be explained, but by the philosophical scheme implicit in the narrative. In these circumstances one simply cannot talk about the explanation (among a number of different types of explanation offered with reference to a single historical event), as if the other explanations were wrong, or inferior, or somehow figurative or metaphorical, or mere aids to understanding. If there is internal coherence in a narrative, one can only choose to quarrel with the explanation-scheme, not with any single explanation within a scheme. One cannot talk of a "correct" explanation except within what can only be described as a metaphysical scheme.

4. Significance

The significance or importance of different events, individuals, institutions, and other subjects of historical study plays an essential role in written history. In a historical account it is essential to the explanation of

the particular and the understanding of the whole that all events are not narrated as if they were equally important. For example, event A will be seen as crucial, event B clearly has an important bearing on affairs, while events C and D are, despite appearances, entirely peripheral to the situation; individual X personally affected the course of events, whereas individual Y simply swam with the tide and can thus be discounted, and so forth. The selection of material that is "significant" in any particular account, and which it is hoped will provide the explanation of events, depends in the first place on what the historian believes is significant in the world, or on what he thinks can be significant in the world; and this, to a marked extent, will depend on the historian's personal scheme of values and not only on the relationship of one event to other events that preceded or followed, or were simultaneous with, it.

Now, it is obviously easy to believe that, if objective history is to be possible, there must be an objective significance and an objective importance possessed by the constituents of the past, so that the degree of importance (if one could somehow measure it with a certain exactness) would be one that was constant and objectively established. It might be held, for example, that the French Revolution is a clear instance of an event that is undoubtedly of immense significance in any scheme of history, and consequently must possess an objective significance. The soundness of this sort of evaluation,

in respect of significance, of the French Revolution is thought of as a paradigm of what might be achieved by historians in their evaluation of many other events. Yet, even when it is asserted that the French Revolution is significant in history, we may insist on having an answer to the question, "In what history?" The answer, of course, is likely to be: "In world history", or "In the history of the world", since it will be readily conceded that the French Revolution could have little or no significance in a social history of India or a cultural history of China or a general history of black Africa; nor is it of central importance even in a history of the United States although it figures largely in some ways in American history. So it might be agreed that the French Revolution certainly has what is basically a European significance, but, all the same, it has such an enormous significance in European history, and as an event had so many effects in the world beyond France, that it must be held to be, in an unqualified way, "historically significant". If it is acknowledged that the French Revolution has a significance for world history, this significance must be seen as non-relative (to any particular region or topic of history) and as indisputable, just because of the vastness of its consequences. Thus it will be maintained that it has an objective significance in history because it is indisputably significant, and significant for the history of the world as a whole (although not necessarily for every part of it). However, this argument does not take into account

that although it can be maintained that the significance of the French Revolution is not relative to any area or topic, it cannot similarly be held that its significance is not relative to time. The importance of the French Revolution is relative to the world history of today. Of course, it may continue to have an indisputable significance, although in two thousand years' time it will be as remote from the people of that era as the Peloponnesian War (which still has a significance in world history) is from us today, while two thousand years after that it may get no more than the equivalent of a lengthy footnote in contemporary histories of the world. Even though its academic significance may be maintained, its real significance must diminish with time. Yet even its academic significance may not be permanent, for history itself shows how easily whole civilizations may be swept away with only the barest of memories remaining. All significance is intrinsically transient, although it may happen contingently that the historical significance of some events is never lost. Historical significance is always relative to something within history, such as an area, a topic, or a period of world history. If there is to be objective significance it cannot be thought of as a significance that is non-relative: it will always be relative to something, it will always be in its own nature impermanent, and, consequently, there will always be some conceivable, relevant historical context in which its significance may be entirely denied.

In order to counter possible objections, it may be observed here that if knowledge is conceived as in some way socially determined or defined, then significance, where some historical event has a significance for a particular society as a whole, will be non-relative and absolute in the requisite sense. However, it should have become sufficiently clear by now that my own conception of "objectivity", "significance", and other terms that can be interpreted in a socially relative way, demands for a term like "absolute objectivity", and would demand (if it were possible) for a term like "absolute significance", an absoluteness that is not intrasocietal but intersocietal.[22]

However, although the significance of an event is always relative, this does not mean that the attribution of relative significance cannot be objective and absolute. It must be continually borne in mind that words like "significance" and "importance" are words that require to be related to something, that is to say, they are inherently relative, and where the relational complement necessary for their full meaning is not given it must be understood. We may talk of "significance" and not qualify it in any way, but the relation is always implicitly there; "importance" is always in or for something or to somebody, even if ultimately for mankind as a whole. Significance in history is relative to the constituents of the historical account. It is dependent on the historian's evaluation of events, and is a significance related to those events and the

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22. See also above, chap. IV, sect. 3.

historian's interpretation of them. The historian selects a first set of events, say, as significant for a second set of events; his attribution of significance to the first set in relation to the second set may be objectively correct, but it must not be forgotten that the second set of events too is a result of the historian's process of selection. Significance, although relative, is, as it is attributed, objectively open to criticism, because it can be disputed on factual grounds either according to the historical events themselves or according to the historian's terms of reference. Significance is in no way some strange (factual) property of certain historical events; significance is given to an event by the scheme in which it is placed, and, of course, in relation to the other events of that scheme it does possess a genuine objective significance. But without such a scheme and the relations it engenders there can be no significance for any event.

Further comments on how a scheme of past events as a whole is to be understood must be left until the next chapter. The point of discussing "significance" above must be related most directly to the problem of selection. Selection cannot be "objectively" determined by a supposedly single type of historical explanation, and it cannot be decided through a postulated possession by at least some historical events of an "intrinsic" significance that somehow cannot be ignored. That an event is intrinsically part of our own history, and a significant part of it, does not mean that it must be intrinsically significant. To

believe that significance is in some sense genuinely "real" is to make a confusion between written history and history-as-actuality.

5. Selection and balance in the historian's work

Selection is inextricably intertwined both with evaluation and description on one side and with explanation and understanding on the other. These logically separable activities cannot in practice be separated and ordered in such a fashion that we might be enabled to say, for example, that the historian should evaluate all the material available to him, and then, secondly, select from this material, before, thirdly, proceeding to give a simple description, and, fourthly, interpreting and explaining what he has described. It must be emphasized that, in the practice of history, all these activities take place together: the activity of studying and writing history cannot be broken down analytically in actuality. Obviously the historian will often concentrate on one activity; but, all the same, no ordered procedure can be laid down. Evaluation and selection, for instance, are clearly determined by ideas which the historian may bring to his primary material, and such ideas should apparently belong to the (seeming) last step of historical work, the synthetic understanding. Description simply considered is bound to include a way of describing that is already partly explanatory and interpretational. Failure to achieve a

complete comprehension of what was happening in the past under study will (or should) lead to a search for new primary material or a new evaluation of this material.

Explanation in history, it has been made clear, cannot be defined in terms of any one explanation-model; thus, the selection of historical material, its evaluation and interpretation (which will be determined in many cases by the type of explanation to be given) cannot automatically result from objective theoretical requirements. The historian cannot know from his knowledge of historical explanatory principles alone to select from all the evidence at his disposal material of a socioeconomic nature, say, as a causal factor, rather than statements about the conscious intentions of individuals, as a rational factor.

As the historian chooses the type of explanation to be preferred in a certain context, so the selection of material will ultimately be a personal matter, determined, first, socially, and, second, psychologically. What we select from the past as the subject of research, what we find worth looking at in detailed study (and what we choose to leave behind) is not only in broad outline but also in many of its details determined by the current interests and preoccupations of society and the individual. 'We preserve from the past that which interests us,' observes Raymond Aron; 'historical selection is guided by the questions which the present asks of the past.'[23]

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23. "Relativism in history", in The philosophy of history in our time, ed. Hans Meyerhoff (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), 157.

Regarding any chosen subject-matter, selection will be determined initially, obviously, by the historian's topic, by the way in which the historian believes events are to be explained and by the historian's value-scheme.[24] The broad pattern of the selection of material determined by these factors will provide a framework for the details of the historical narrative. And, when once the general principles of selection are clear, the way the historian selects and evaluates his material can be criticized according to those principles: historical selection, therefore, is open to objective criticism.

Within the framework of general selection the details given can be judged under two broad headings: inclusion and exclusion of facts, and balance. Again, these two headings can only be considered separately for certain analytic and theoretical purposes. In actuality, the process of inclusion and exclusion of facts will be taking place along with, and will be inseparable from, the process of achieving a balanced account.

The inclusion and exclusion of facts is selection proper; that is to say, it refers to the choice of material made by the historian. The historian must select,

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24. See above, chap. IV, sect. 2. Value-judgments and their consequences cannot be entirely excluded from historical accounts, even by the most conscientious of historians. They are bound to enter into the selection and interpretation of facts. The historian must include some facts and exclude others; and he must choose to link up the facts included in his account in one way rather than another. The methods he chooses in his historical work, the facts he selects, the connections he perceives, will inevitably be decided to a certain extent by his general outlook and the part values play in his own life.

and include in his account a statement of, those facts which he believes to be intrinsically important for what he is saying. If he is to be honest his account must deal with those facts that seem to run counter to his argument as well as those that support it. In this respect, selection is not philosophically problematical; that is to say, there need be no doubts about the possibility of objectivity in the account the historian produces: given a knowledge of the historian's thesis, his explanatory scheme, and his general terms of reference, what is included in, and what is excluded from, his account is open to objective criticism; and, in an objective way, changes and improvements can be made to the account.

The selection of facts that the historian makes is also determined by the balance that the historian seeks to attain in his narrative. By my use of the term "balance" I mean to imply nothing more than that the selection of material made by the historian should in a real way fairly represent the whole. The balance of an account will in its turn be determined in two ways: first, the balance must be one that is adequately justified by the historical evidence. To begin with, and if there are no countervailing considerations of which account must be taken, the historian must attempt to keep the relative stature, as he presents it, of the discrete elements of his subject-matter, of individuals and events, in a proper correspondence with the relative stature which they possessed in past reality as that is given in the evidence,

to the degree to which the historian may satisfactorily understand that reality through his sources. Two points need to be made here. Firstly, in order to achieve the aim set for him above, the historian will not attempt merely to mirror an importance contemporary to the events themselves; if he were to act in that way, he would be disregarding the historian's necessary use of hindsight, and the important consideration that historical importance is determined by the future of an event as well as by its past. Secondly, no sort of actually existent importance is to be attributed to the events themselves: the importance they are given is initially to be found in the evidence for them. The evidence may be so interpreted, of course, that the significance represented through the way the account is balanced is nothing like the significance that is immediately apparent from first considerations of the evidence. Such interpretations must obviously receive adequate justification, and in the end they can only receive such justification through the evidence.

The second of the ways in which balance is determined is of a functional character: the historian will strive to achieve that balance in his account which is most conducive to a full and satisfactory historical understanding of events. He must so develop and present the material he selects that the events and characters of the narrative are interrelated in such a way as to work towards an optimum understanding, on the part of the reader, of the events as the historian believes them to have happened and

of their significance as that will ensure that the happenings of the past will be most satisfactorily and usefully understood. By reason of this balance, necessitated by the goal of comprehension, the historian will often be unlikely to include facts -- even those that might seem to have clearly stood out in the past -- which could well confuse a reader and give him a false picture of events: for example, a particular event might be a good corroborative instance of some general assertion made by the historian, but since the historian has already given some instances that testify to his assertion, the citation of this additional instance will be no more than repetitious in the context, and since other aspects of it may divert the reader's attention from the point in question and even come to muddle him, the fact, while of some importance, could most usefully for the historian's purposes be omitted or played down.

Selection is determined initially by broad schematic considerations, and then by a necessity to achieve within these considerations not merely a balanced representation but, more, a balanced interpretation of the past. It needs to be stressed that the historian's aim is the attainment of a balanced <u>interpretation</u>, for a balanced representation would do no more than provide an account of past history-as-actuality that retained all the imperfections of a purely contemporary understanding of events. This relationship of selection and interpretation can be profitably developed to refute any argument for the notion of some

sort of fixed selection of past events as "historical". The selection by a historian, in his study of a historical situation, of certain events to be used in description and explanation, and his omission of others, is not, in even the most comprehensive and exhaustive study, a definitive selection. Future historians may choose to select and omit different events in their studies of the same historical topic. As Aron has written:

> [S]election is not to be understood [as] an initial step taken once and for all, but a continuing orientation of historical work. Selection is not just the decision to study or ignore this or that fact; it is a certain way of construing facts, of choosing concepts, arranging complexes and of putting events and periods into perspective.[25]

Evaluation, which can be considered as the step that logically follows selection (while not literally following it in actuality), develops the initial significance which past events possess in the historical evidence, and modifies or supersedes it, creating a new significance for the events of the past and one that is related at least in part to the ideas and aims of the historian. This evaluation need not in theory compromise objectivity, so long as the historical significance attributed to events is clearly and legitimately related, in so far as it must be, to the interests of the historian, and so long as the historian is not making use of methods that cannot be considered permissible in history, or serving purposes that must be considered extra- or even anti-historical. Ideally, the historian will not be asserting any immediate

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25. Op. cit., 158.

"objective" or "absolute" significance about certain events, but will be claiming a significance that is at least partially only relative to his thesis. Consequently the full attributions of significance made by the historian are to be accepted or rejected only as his thesis as a whole is accepted or rejected. If a historical thesis can, through the evidence, be proved by events, then the events that support it may be seen as significant if the thesis itself seems an important one. But to start talking about a historian's thesis leads us to the topics of interpretation and understanding, for it is time now to consider the part played in history by the conception of a narrative as a whole.

VIII

THE HISTORIAN AND HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

1. Explanation and understanding

By separating explanation and understanding in order to treat of them in different chapters I may seem to be establishing a greater division between the two concepts than is warranted. Before proceeding with an examination of understanding, therefore, I ought to try to clarify in what way and to what degree explanation in history, on the one hand, and historical interpretation and understanding, on the other, must be considered distinct. With many writers the use of the term "explanation" probably covers both of those features of historical writing that I attempt to distinguish as "explanation" (proper) and "understanding". One can offer a broad distinction between the two in the following terms. Explanation is an analytic activity; logically, it depends on a breaking-down of the historical whole -- and by my use of the word "whole" I mean no more than that any particular part of the past is a single intricate complex of facts -- as far as possible into discrete elements which may then be individually examined and the causal and other factors that underlie them elucidated.[1] Understanding, on the contrary, is the

1. The analytic nature of explanation is emphasized by the realization that explanation can only be considered effective according to the depth and degree of its

historian's grasp of the whole; in conveying his historical understanding, the historian attempts to enable his readers to understand the particular period, or region, or topic with which he is dealing in its real unity as a complex process. Interpretation is the activity of somehow coming to relate the discrete events and analysed elements of history to the historian's single understanding. The clear separation of explanation and understanding stresses the importance in history of the synthesizing activity as well as the analysing activity. As Louis O. Mink has said:

> [History] cultivates the specialized habit of understanding which converts congeries into concatenations, and emphasizes and increases the scope of synoptic judgment in our reflection on experience.[2]

Again, it must be stressed that to give features of development by an instance of written history a logical order is in no way intended to suggest that this order is to be seen in the reality of historiographical practice. With regard to explanation and understanding, the two processes are interdependent: the analysis of the past will develop and change the historian's understanding, and his understanding will determine in significant ways much of his explanation. Explanation and understanding, analysis and synthesis, will often be found occurring simply as one integrated activity in historical work.

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analysis: large-scale explanations will simply stimulate a demand for further, more detailed explanations.

2. "The autonomy of historical understanding", in Philosophical analysis and history, ed. William H. Dray (New York, 1966), 191.

In pulling together and completing his work of written history the historian, through the final arrangement and structure of his account and the relation and disposition of factual and evaluative elements, makes known to the reader that understanding of events which is at once both personally his own and, as he believes, peculiarly informative, enlightening or innovative about the past events examined. One dominant feature of the finished historical narrative is that the historian will be seeking to explain adequately to his audience "what is going on" (as it might be phrased) in the historical events he is describing. Some writers are obviously making reference to this activity when they talk of the historian "telling us the truth about the past" or "saying what was really happening". Unfortunately, the use of phrases of this kind ascribes to the interpretation and understanding of history a factuality equivalent to the factual quality of the physical and mental historical events themselves.

I mentioned earlier that historical understanding is one area in history where the historian with his individuality "comes into his own". It will be necessary for me at this point to enumerate and comment on some of the aspects of the "understanding" of history. I intend to do this under six heads: holistic particulars; mock laws (as I have called them); the relevant aspects of a historical situation; the question of intuition; the place of values in understanding; and the historian's thesis and comprehensive interpretation.

2. Holistic particulars and colligatory concepts

I have already introduced the concept of holistic particulars in a previous chapter under a discussion of generalization, but without exploring their nature and function in detail. These historical particulars would seem to be of two main types. One type is the corporate individual:[3] this bears some relation to the legal concept of such entities as companies and societies, but in history it extends further to include such formal entities as the Catholic Church or the Holy Roman Empire,[4] informal collective entities like the liberal movement of the nineteenth century or the conservation movement of today, and abstract entities like the Papacy or the Presidency of some country. For the most part, these will not be the creation of the historian, although occasionally in his study of the past the historian may discern an informal grouping of individuals, for example, which he may be the first to christen a "movement" or a "party" of one sort or another, and treat logically as a particular. For the most part, entities of this nature are already established, and so

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3. In "The historical individual" (in Dray (ed.): op. cit.) Danto refers to "social individuals"; but these include such entities as "the Thirty Years War". What characterizes the corporate individual, in contrast to Danto's concept, is that it can be described as an agent, and be the subject of the language of agency (e.g., "The Catholic Church achieved such-and-such" or "The Presidency exerted an ever-stronger influence"); to such entities are attributed meaningful actions rather than simple lifeless properties.

4. Formal entities also include geographical entities like Africa or Scandinavia, political entities like the United Kingdom, national entities like Poland or Armenia (where political or geographical continuity may be lost).

do not create any initial conceptual problems for historians.[5] Much more interesting is the second type of holistic particular, the idealized individual, for this, although it will often not be a new creation of the historian, will still be in some significant respects differently conceived by each historian who refers to what is ostensibly the same particular. To what, then, do I refer by the phrase "idealized individuals"? Examples are frequent in historical works: such concepts as the medieval student, the Hungarian peasant, the towndweller of the thirteenth century, the statesman of the twentieth century, will be widely recognized. The idealized individual is not intended to refer in any way to any particular actual individual who might be thought to answer to the initial description. Consequently, the properties and attributes of the idealized individual will not be found complete in any real individual. There is a certain correspondence here between the historical idealized individual and the statistical average individual; when we have a working knowledge of the latter, and find that it is a useful concept in practice, we obviously never expect to find in reality a family with, say, 2.62 children; but the caveat must be entered that, in regard to the method of its establishment, the idealized individual in history must not be thought of as necessarily sharing the basis of its formulation with the average individual of statistics. Even where a historical concept has been

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5. For a brief discussion of holism and individualism see Appendix B.

wholly derived from statistical work it had to be interpreted in order to become historical.[6] All the same, the idealized individual does share some of the usefulness of the statistical concept in that it provides a "picture" of a certain accuracy so long as it is understood that any actual individual will only approximate to the ideal; but in many significant respects it will be a meaningful approximation which occurs. The concept of the idealized individual is historically useful in two ways: first, because it is something like an average, it gives us knowledge about the group, as a whole, of the individuals referred to -- in this case the idealized individual "stands for" all the members of a group of individuals sharing common interests, often a similar standard of life, and a similar way of thinking, with like ambitions, and fears, and grievances; second, because it tells us about the group as a whole, it can, in some contexts, if the historical narrative is developed in a certain way, give important information about how an actual individual encountered in the past differs from the "norm" and suggest how some of the attributes of this individual may not be those of all the members of the class as they are

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6. For an examination of the statistical construction of average individuals or "real types", see G. G. S. Murphy and M. G. Mueller: "On making historical techniques more specific: 'real types' constructed with a computer", History and Theory, 6 (1967). The inadequacy for history of many statistically based real types is clear from the statement by the authors that their process 'can be of no help to the intellectual historian who wishes to discover the essential ideas of a society, ideas which serve to prescribe conduct and make for changes in customs and laws'. This side of history is closed to statistical inquiries: 'a real type cannot handle that type of inquiry'.(28) Of course, it is not just the intellectual historian who is interested in ideas.

represented in the idealized individual. The creation of an idealized individual enables the historian to tell us things about real individuals by enabling him to direct his attention to those features of real individuals which he may believe to matter on the relatively wide scale of much history considered generally, or for the purposes of the particular historical narrative in which it is found. At least today, part of the concept of the idealized individual is established statistically, so with respect to this part, there can be no doubts that it is clearly and freely open to the most straightforward objective criticism. But whereas in sociology and other social sciences a norm is expected to be established according to "scientific" principles, in history a large part of any concept of the individual may be established through what can only be described as an intuitive grasp of what was typical. I shall try to say something about intuition below; here, by 'an intuitive grasp of what was typical' I mean an understanding of history, founded on a sound historical knowledge and developed in any particular instance by extensive study and research, which enables the historian to grasp as a whole the appropriate concept of any abstracted individual rather than to develop a concept analytically as a sort of logical construction. What distinguishes the good historian is that his intuitive conception turns out to be exceptionally accurate and fits into an intelligible and coherent historical picture. The claim that the nature of much of the historian's procedure

is intuitive rests not on the untrue assertion that an analytic basis for any particular conception of an idealized individual cannot be discovered, but on the manifest truth that, in order to create an analytic basis for a concept like the idealized individual, we have to make explicit facts and ways of thinking that would not have been explicit, or even implicitly present, for the historian. The argument in support of this kind of intuition is not that historical statements cannot be analysed satisfactorily, but that the historian may not work in the way analysis suggests, but in quite a different way. To talk of a historian working in a "logical" sort of way, even if a logical structure is only understood to be implicit in the form of historical method when that is analysed in a certain way, is to give an erroneous picture of the way many historians actually work. The results of historical intuition are not simply implicitly analytical but have been produced by a procedure that is quite separate and non-logical. To strive for an adequate logical analysis of much historical procedure can be a vain pursuit in the philosophy of history, for it may mean that the true nature of actual historical method (in its intuitive aspects) is completely ignored. Philosophers may find methodologically horrifying the statements made by some historians about the intuitive approach to history; yet some notice must be taken of, and attempts made to clarify, what, for example, A. J. P. Taylor means when he says that

> Namier used to complain that I had green fingers. I sensed what had happened, whereas he had to confirm every detail from the records.[7]

Whatever can be done logically with some elements of history, it is not something that is done or needs to be done by the historian. It must be emphasized that no exclusive assertion is being made here: although history need not be done logically, it is true that some historians certainly do use logical and analytic methods in drawing their conclusions about events of the past and in forming concepts like holistic particulars and colligatory concepts.

Colligatory concepts, to which we may now turn, are best described by citing directly certain passages by Professor Walsh, who reintroduced such concepts into the philosophy of history to explain the character of a very important feature of many historical narratives.[8] He points out that historians

> do, in fact, explain events by pointing to ideas which they embody and citing other events with which they are intimately connected, even though they know that many of the agents concerned had little if any conscious awareness of the ideas in question. And their justification for doing this is the fact ... that ideas can exert an influence on people's conduct even when they are not continuously before the minds of the persons who act on them. ...
>
> It seems clear to me that this process of "colligating" events under "appropriate conceptions", to use

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7. A. J. P. Taylor: "What history is about" (a review of The history primer by J. H. Hexter), The Observer, 17 December 1972.

8. Dray's idea of explanation through classification, of events as a "social revolution", for example, should also be remembered in the context of colligatory concepts. See his "'Explaining what' in history", in Theories of History, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York, 1959).

> Whewell's term, does form an important part of historical thinking, and I should myself connect it with what was said ... about the historian's aim to make a coherent whole out of the events he studies. His way of doing that, I suggest, is to look for certain dominant concepts or leading ideas by which to illuminate his facts, to trace connections between those ideas themselves, and then to show how the detailed facts become intelligible in the light of them by constructing a "significant" narrative of the events of the period in question. ...
>
> ... In saying that the historian attempts to find intelligibility in history by colligating events according to appropriate ideas I am suggesting no theory of the ultimate moving forces in history. I say nothing about the origin of the ideas on which the historian seizes; it is enough for me that those ideas were influential at the time of which he writes.[9]

Two points in this passage might lead to misunderstanding in connection with my own argument and must therefore be cleared up now. While broadly agreeing with the usefulness of colligation and the way in which Professor Walsh defines it, it should be noted that "explanation" refers in the passage to what I should call "understanding", since the sort of explanation which colligation provides is not the strict analytic sort, but the looser type of explanation that is provided through the historian's interpretation. Indeed, Professor Walsh, writing on the subject of colligation in a later essay, comes round to this view, and states that the activity of colligation is concerned 'more with interpretation than with explanation'.[10] Colligation, I would claim, belongs to that historical understanding which is a synthetic grasp of the

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9. W. H. Walsh: Philosophy of history: an introduction (New York, 1960), 61-63.

10. "Colligatory concepts in history", in Studies in the nature and teaching of history, ed. W. H. Burston and D. Thompson (London, 1967), 75.

whole; and I believe that it is useful to distinguish the two concepts of explanation and understanding with a certain degree of sharpness. In the severe terms of strict explanatory analysis many colligatory "explanations" would show up rather poorly: their truth and effectiveness depend on their place in the whole. Additionally, where Professor Walsh talks of a "significant" narrative, there seems at any rate to be a suggestion that significance comes through the interpretation of historical events in the light of a colligatory concept; it must be emphasized that colligation is only <u>one</u> way of providing a framework for "significance", or, as I should prefer to put it for the purposes of my own argument, it is only one way of achieving a historical understanding, or one contribution towards such an understanding.

The criticism of colligatory understanding as that concept is set out in the passage above is that its nature might be understood in too restricted a fashion. When colligation is linked with rational explanation, any colligatory concepts that the historian may find useful seem obliged to have their origin in the ideas of the time (that is, ideas that are contemporaneous with the historical subject), even though it is not necessary that the personages involved in the account should <u>always</u> be conscious of those ideas. Yet this would seem to be an unnecessary restriction; and it seems too to be one that falsifies the nature of some examples of colligatory understanding as they are to be found in actual historical

narratives. It is undeniably the case that some colligation rightly has its origin in the ideas of the historian's time and not in the ideas of the period of history studied. A very broad example of this can be given: it may be that a history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been written with reference to the colligatory concept of "the age of reason". This is clearly a concept with its origin in the time studied, for many men of that time both acted according to rational principles and acknowledged them as rational principles. But it may be that another era has been written about as "an age of decadence": this would be a very important colligatory concept, yet it is only infrequently the case that those who act decadently and those who live in a decadent period consciously acknowledge at any time their decadence and think in explicitly decadent ways. Occasionally a few individuals do so (the fin-de-siècle attitude, for instance), but their actions in this regard are never typical of their age. By no means is a near-universal and conscious acknowledgment necessary for this type of colligation, but isolated and individual examples of consciously acknowledged decadence must surely be an inadequate justification for the colligatory concept used, both because of their small number and their untypicalness, where conceptual contemporaneity is required. Many persons (and those who are truly typical of their age) behave decadently without acknowledging or, more significantly, without being able to acknowledge that they behave thus; and often many

individuals believe that they are living in a decadent age but are really quite wrong. Some colligatory concepts connected with a historical period are open to a correct adoption by individuals of that period; other colligatory concepts, however, require the hindsight and judgment of history or, sometimes, a development of knowledge unknown to contemporaries before they can be linked with a certain historical period. As Professor Walsh points out:

> [I]t is apparent that the summary description we offer of past periods of history ... are often framed in terms which are intelligible to us but would have little or no meaning for the persons whose activities and experiences they purport to sum up.[11]

And, as with other explanatory features of written history, colligatory concepts look to the future of the events they refer to as well as to their present and past.

Colligatory concepts are the way in which an individual historian utilizes his own judgment with regard to the historical events he is studying. There should be no problem of objectivity in their regard. Either the concepts are well-known and accepted, and the historian will, perhaps, be throwing new light on them by adducing new facts to support or refute them; or they will be new concepts in those cases where the historian feels that a worthwhile understanding of some historical period can be achieved through a new colligation. Like the historian's thesis about a subject or period a new colligation will be open to objective criticism because its concepts will be, or should be, supported by factual evidence and a clearly

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11. Ibid., 75.

followable interpretation. Colligatory concepts must be based in the end on certain facts about the past.

Colligatory concepts are related to holistic particulars since they take some characteristics of the attitudes of a period and make of them one "idealized" attitude that is held to be typical of the period. For the class, as a whole, of holistic particulars and colligatory concepts, only the "idealized individual" should create doubts about the possibility of objectivity. Regarding this type of particular, based as it is partly on objective criteria like statistical evidence, but often to a larger extent on the individual historian's own intuitive grasp of affairs, it must be maintained that in the case of each historian who uses the same term each concept will differ considerably from those of other historians because the different experiences, the different interests, the different attitudes, and the different methods of each individual historian can only result in the formation of a uniquely detailed concept. Does this not seem to create an irremediable subjectivity for concepts of this nature?

It must be agreed that a concept like "the medieval student", as used by different individual historians, will contain some very significant subjective elements. However, subjectivity in history does not of itself entail subjective history, as I hope I have shown to some extent in what I said about the place and effect of value-judgments in a historical narrative. The idealized individual is best seen as a functional concept: it can be, for

example, a useful element in further research, or it may furnish a picture of certain abstracted salient characteristics of many individuals of a period. It must not be understood to "represent" any sort of physical reality. In itself it is as seriously distorted and detached from reality as the statistical average individual who, it seems, must only possess things in fractions. The idealized individual is not an objective concept and is best not understood as an objective concept. It must be understood in the context of the narrative in which it occurs, and in its relation to the purposes of that narrative and the understanding of the individual historian who formulates and uses it. It is only in this context, and not in any sort of isolation, that it can be judged.

The idealized individual and, more generally, the holistic particular and the colligatory concept are in a sense summative concepts; and they provide us with understanding of part or the whole of a period or with partial understanding within a period. They offer an important contribution to the understanding rather than the explanation of history. They have a significance that is not merely found in the past alone but in the relationship of the past to the present -- indeed, to that particular present of the historian whose concepts they are.

3. Mock laws

A further contribution to historical understanding is made by those statements which I have chosen to call "mock laws". They are both of very frequent occurrence in historical work and also very characteristic of narrative history. To a degree they have a summative function although it is a loose and not a logical one. Their form makes it easy for them to be mistaken for examples of true covering laws. It is this similarity to true laws that prompts my choice of name, and this choice is reinforced by the tendency of historians to use in conjunction with them a quasi-deductive language. Before I proceed further with a discussion of mock laws it would be well to give a few examples of them: these that follow have all been culled fairly easily from well-known historical writers.

> Invention ... is more likely to arise in a community that sets store by things of the mind than in one that seeks only material ends. The stream of English scientific thought, issuing from the teaching of Francis Bacon, and enlarged by the genius of Boyle and Newton, was one of the main tributaries of the industrial revolution.[12]

> A political community has a way of life like a school or a trade union; and the individuals, so far as they are members of the community, are shaped by that way of life, even while they are helping to change it.[13]

> The lofty and fervent mind of Charles was not free from the stirrings of personal ambition: yet these may be excused as being almost inseparable from an intense and restless genius, which, be it never so unselfish

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12. T. S. Ashton: The industrial revolution, 1760-1830 (London, 1962), 15.

13. A. J. P. Taylor: The course of German history (London, 1945), 14.

> in its ends, must in pursuing them fix upon everything its grasp and raise out of everything its monument.[14]

> Men are loath to wait on observation and experiment before they attempt to explain the nature of the physical world, and it seems equally impossible for them to accept it unexplained. The triumphs of reason had been too startling in the seventeenth century for intelligent men to accept unquestioned the dogmatic theology of an earlier age.[15]

> It is a paradox that no important people or forces in France of 1789 wanted revolution. Revolutions may begin, as wars often begin, not because people positively want them. They happen because people want other things that, in a certain set of circumstances, implicate them in revolution or in war.[16]

The general statements in all these examples have the appearance of laws; and one could well imagine the passages above being used as examples of how historians explain events. But the use of general statements like those above as covering laws in explanation would be quite unwarranted, regardless of whether the historians' assertions are true; and so these passages provide no support for the covering-law position. This is because the general assertions made are not based on the same sort of reasoning and logical processes that go towards the formation of the general statement of a true law. Statements like those above are no different in their logical grounds from the statements of common sense; of course, historical statements are rather better off with respect to the historical past than those of common sense because they are grounded

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14. James Bryce: The Holy Roman Empire (London, 1918), 42.

15. J. H. Plumb: England in the eighteenth century (1714-1815) (Harmondsworth, 1950), 29.

16. David Thomson: Europe since Napoleon (Harmondsworth, 1966), 24.

in a sound historical knowledge. It may be that they can be analysed in a scientific way, and obviously in other kinds of contexts, since nothing can be deduced from their form alone, they might be intended as exact statements of general covering laws. But the mere possibility of a scientific analysis does not entail an underlying scientific formulation. Mock laws are not worked out by a rigorous logical deduction. For the historian such statements are made with an immediacy and spontaneity which does not belong to those statements that are the results of a process of logical reasoning. They result from an immediate perception of what is significant for the historian in a certain situation. Despite their form they are not "scientific" laws, and indeed the historian would be unlikely to make any claims on their behalf in that direction. To interpret them as a type of exact covering-law statement is to misunderstand them in a way which it is clear that no historian has intended them to be taken in. The "commonsense" rather than "scientific" aspect of these statements is also made clear when we consider that for the historian they are often examples of the "grand statement", or sometimes of the sententious aside; the worst examples are nothing more than platitudes.

The lawlike appearance of these mock laws is enhanced by the apparently deductive way in which the historian makes use of them, as if the particular statement that followed them were merely an illustration of the general point they seem to present. And yet -- paradoxical as it

may sound -- where these mock laws occur in a narrative, it is not the particular that is illustrative of the general, but rather the general statement that is illustrative of the particular instance. By this I mean to say that it is the statement about the particular instance that is always foremost in the historian's thought. The historian realizes, because of his historical knowledge, that the instance is somehow typical of certain tendencies in history or even simply in life; and on account of this inherent typicality he finds it appropriate to make a "general" statement which has the function of bringing out the significant aspects of the particular, and making what is especially significant in the particular more readily understandable by presenting it in an abstract and general way. The general statement declares the historian's belief or knowledge that certain tendencies, for example, are typically found in similar circumstances. He would be unlikely to claim an exact basis for his statement: if he were asked to justify it he could merely cite supporting examples, and, if pressed, might ultimately rely on a statement of how he personally "saw things". The general statement also acts as a summary of the relevant aspects of what is to come as they are instantiated in the particular: it might be said that it tells us what to look for and take particular notice of in the detailed description. If the historical account lacks the logical order that seems to be required, that is to say, the order in which the summative general statement <u>follows</u> the detailed

particular description, this should not be taken as indicating the presence of something like a covering law which the historian adduces at the beginning of his reasoning in order to support his own detailed description and explanation of events. The order that suggests a movement from the general to the particular, as if there were some quasi-scientific method to be discovered, should be understood as a literary or rhetorical device, intended, through its abstract and general form, to make the historian's point or the historian's interpretation of events much more effective and more immediately comprehensible to his readers.

4. The relevant aspects of a situation

It should be emphasized that many of the general statements of historians are genuine "sound" generalizations that may have been reached in a logical way by the historian himself or may have been taken from the findings of other disciplines. But those general statements which are not based completely on a strict factual analysis depend in some degree for their effectiveness on finding or arousing a certain sympathy in the reader. Indeed, historical understanding as a whole comes at the last to depend in part on some sort of sympathy arising between the historian, his subject-matter, and his reader. Explanation proper does not require the existence of any such sympathy: if its own terms are granted, it should depend for acceptance simply on a cold, logical assessment. Such

general statements of the historian as mock laws seem to be examples of explanation, but they do in fact contribute to historical understanding; they require the presence of a certain sympathy in the historian's audience with the historian and his subject. In a different way, those details of an event which the historian picks out and claims as the "relevant aspects" of a situation for his explanation are not strictly entirely explanatory but depend for their acceptance by an audience on the existence of true sympathy. How sympathy is important for true understanding in history is a point that I shall develop later in this chapter; in this section I shall concentrate on the problem of the relevant aspects of a situation.

Mock laws have the appearance of covering laws, as a basis for explanation, but are not covering laws. What I refer to as the "relevant aspects" of a situation provide the basis of a proffered explanation: considered in themselves the explanations provided are genuine -- the problem they present is one of selectivity, of how the historian is able to decide which are the relevant aspects of a situation for an adequate explanation. Because of the complexity of history, almost all explanations of the covering-law type select intensively; and it is the feature of selectivity presented by covering laws that I wish to examine here. It will be useful to return to an example I used in chapter VI, the passage of Teggart's relating to correlations between events in the Roman and Chinese empires.

I gave as an instance of a possible general law derived from the statement of Teggart's a rather clumsy formulation which would begin, perhaps: "In conditions like those existing in Europe between 58 BC and AD 107 every uprising by peoples like (i.e., corresponding in significant respects to) the barbarians in Europe at that time follows the outbreak on certain (specified) frontiers of an empire like the Roman Empire at that time, or in certain (specified) regions, like the Chinese T'ien Shan at that time." Such a statement would require many qualifications before it could be considered to have attained any sort of final form. Nevertheless, the formulation of any useful general laws in history, with all the complexities of actual concrete situations to be taken into account, would require the statement of a restricted generalization like Teggart's with a subsequent heavily qualified statement that in conditions similar to those outlined significantly similar events will occur.

However, we must then ask what sort of practically satisfactory general law could be produced by a procedure of this kind. What could it mean to talk of conditions "like" those in Europe between 58 BC and AD 107? How are we to tell in what way and to what extent a similarity in conditions will be found relevant and applicable in historical work. In this context a defender of historical laws might elaborate on the possibilities of historical regularity by suggesting the consideration of the "relevant aspects" of a situation, readily admitting that no

historical situation in its entirety is at all like any other.[17] However, a consideration of the importance of general history shows that historical situations can only finally be understood as quite integral situations.[18] A "relevant aspect" -- for example, economic, political, or demographic -- may be nothing more than a convenient foundation on which to build a generalized explanation that fits the situation. Conditions may only be considered "relevant" when it seems that they are having an effect which is thought to be an "appropriate" one for them. There may be many other potentially relevant aspects in a situation which in fact are held to be irrelevant, because, apparently, the historical researcher simply considers them to be so; and he thinks in this way possibly on account of a belief that, if they had an effect in the actual situation he is studying, it ought to have been a quite different effect.

When we examine a historical situation we may believe that events are satisfactorily and fully explained by a certain prevailing set of conditions. It should be pointed out that on an intuitive level, in the attempt to reach historical understanding, this way of thinking is wholly

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17. In an attempt to deal with the unique complexity of ordinary historical situations some thinkers have put forward the notion of a general law with only one instance. If a general law necessarily having only one instance is meant -- and it may be claimed that, because of the unrepeatable, unique and integral nature of historical events, a historical "law" would have to have only one instance -- I fail to understand the idea.

18. See above, chap. V, sect. 3; for the understanding of complex situations, see this chapter, sect. 5 onwards.

acceptable. Indeed, it is a typically historical way of understanding the events of the past. However, if attempts are made to transform the methods and justifications of intuitive understanding into those of scientific explanation, the historian's way of working will collapse, and claims about "relevance" will seem either arbitrary or self-justifying. Consequently, when we look at actual historical situations, a little imagination will show us that there is frequently a fair range of different and sometimes contrary events that could have come about and been satisfactorily explained, if they had happened, by other actual conditions prevailing concurrently with the set that has been chosen as relevant for explaining what actually happened. The occurrence of an event is supposedly explained by the presence of certain causal conditions in the situation; other similar historical events are cited to prove the point, and various generalizations may be used to justify the historian's reasoning. Yet it is obvious that in many instances the non-occurrence of the actual event could be as easily explained by the presence of other causal conditions in the actual situation, linked to other, acceptable generalizations and "similar" historical examples.

Some illustrative instances of what could be done may be given. If the course of past events had been different a historian might find himself explaining how it was that Britain did not enter the First World War; among conditions also present in <u>our</u> actual past he could point

out that there was no desire for war on the part of the general public, and although Britain was supposedly a guarantor of the neutrality of Belgium in a treaty that was, it should be noted, almost a century old, she accepted that the hostile attack of Germany was directed not against Belgium itself but against France; in any case, that Germany had no immediate quarrel with Britain was obvious. Or perhaps: In general the Dominant Minority's efforts to impose a philosophy or religion upon the Internal Proletariat by political means are apt to be unsuccessful;[19] thus the attempts of Henry VIII, without any large-scale feelings for religious reform on the part of ordinary people, to set up on purely political, or even personal, grounds a so-called "Church of England" were doomed to fail from the beginning, and the traditional Catholicism of the people quickly reasserted itself. Or, as a last example: That Constantine should toy with Christianity might be permitted; that he would ultimately come to reject it was clear from the beginning: no emperor could afford to place in jeopardy his political future and the internal security of the Empire in order to embrace a religion followed perhaps by a mere tenth of the imperial population, and, more significantly, one that counted for nothing among those with power.

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19. Cf. A. J. Toynbee: A study of history, V, 646. This is not, of course, intended to be a hard-and-fast rule. The point is that it could be held as a "satisfactory", and even "decisive", explanation of the endurance of Catholicism in England. (The occurrence of many historical events appears a fairly evenly balanced outcome of its "causes" and needs therefore little explaining.)

We might say, then, that certain existing conditions become the "relevant aspects" of a situation not so much on account of their value for a strict and rigorous explanation as because the results of these conditions, or, more properly, the development of the situation as a whole, runs parallel to the development of a previous situation so that some of the conditions under examination are similar to conditions that existed in the previous situation. Consequently, what may be taken by some people as being an attempt at a full-fledged "scientific" explanation is really an instructive point, emphasizing certain salient characteristics as an aid towards an understanding of the situation. So it may be that apparent general laws and generalizations are really statements only about some similarities existing between certain situations, in no way exhaustive of all the historically noteworthy features of those situations, and possibly indicative of results that are only accidentally similar. The problems here, however, will become clearer when it is shown in what way many examples of apparent generalizations are peculiarly tied to the "vision" and understanding of an individual historian.

5. The historian and intuition

Up to this point I have been discussing what may be called factors in historical understanding; in the remainder of this chapter I intend to look at aspects of historical understanding as a whole. I shall do this through an

examination of intuition, of the contribution of values to understanding, and of interpretation and the historian's theme or thesis (in so far as that is a dominant force in his history).

By the term "intuition" I mean to refer to a process of dealing with concrete historical events as a whole as opposed to a procedure of analysing them through explanation or by means of a complex abstract model. The complexity of many historical events is such that they are able to resist successfully any exhaustive analysis, even when the historian restricts severely his terms of reference, so that even the most rigorous treatment cannot be described as complete or indisputable; yet the historian often seems to "explain" the events of the past successfully. Often this is done, as I have indicated, by picking out "relevant aspects"; but exactly how are these to be selected? A historical procedure like the selection of relevant aspects can only be credibly described as the result of the historian's intuitive grasp of the situation he is studying.

In any discussion of explanation and understanding in history it is essential to take into account the significant, and indeed fundamental, role of intuition in the historian's treatment of his material and the development of his historical account. It is especially in the process of intuition that historical methodology shows how distinct it is from scientific methodology. For illustrative purposes this methodological difference between

history and science can be put in a way which is perhaps fairly crude -- and, in order that it should not prove over-simple, it is not to be developed in much detail -- but which does make the difference very clear. The methods of science can be set down and made explicit in every detail in primers, manuals, and similar books of instruction. In their entire extent these methods can be imparted to different individuals quite explicitly through teaching: the instructions to be followed in the consideration of any problem can be written out in clear and unambiguous language.[20] When the methods of history are set out in some particular fashion in an attempt to make them fully explicit, it must be held on a final consideration that the account still lacks a vital "component"; even the most detailed textbook of historical technique has the appearance of an aid to historical work rather than a manual of instruction.[21] The doing of historical work requires a sort of practice that the doing of scientific work does not: scientific practice consists most often of a series of attempts to master increasingly detailed, or complicated, or difficult techniques in an effort to ensure that the results obtained through using them are always correct; historical practice is most often a series of exercises on

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20. Instructions may only be formulable after the problem has been solved. And part of the language involved may of course be symbolic. What matters, however, is that instructions are completely formulable in explicit ways.

21. I am thinking of such very standard, accepted works as Introduction to the study of history by Ch. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, and more recent books such as An introduction to the study of history by V. H. Galbraith.

the same or similar subjects carried out to develop a historical way of thinking in order to ensure that successive accounts are "better", that is, they should be more deeply developed, have greater insight, and show a better synthesis of the basic materials. To put it simply: one of the main principles underlying scientific criticism is correctness -- in the end one judges scientific accounts as right or wrong; one of the main principles underlying historical work is improvement -- in the end one judges the accounts of historians as better or worse than others. Of course, we also require correctness in a historical account; the point is that we tend to take mere factual correctness for granted (except in connection with historically remote subjects): we do not praise a narrative to any marked extent for being accurate, because we expect something more than factual correctness from good history. Indeed, it is the idea of improvement, of providing a "better" account, without making very many factual corrections to the underlying "bare" account of the past, that often leads historians to treat what is substantially the same subject over and over again. Once it is granted that an account is factually correct and coherent, it is best to think of the understanding of events, as that is evident in the works of different individual historians, as better or worse.

The inability to make an analytic determination of the historian's method regarding his understanding of the historical past requires us to attempt some formulation, however provisional, of a theory of intuition. For the

discipline of psychology the intuitive grasp of the whole is an accepted and attested concept.[22] In the philosophy of history it seems certainly to be a less acceptable concept since so much theory of explanation is formulated either in terms of a covering-law model or in terms of a purely analytic rational model. The difficulty with an attempt to elucidate the notion of "intuition" is that what may be required for a successful definition is an explicit statement of a process that by its very nature cannot be made explicit. Therefore I can only hope to give some idea of what intuition is in two of its forms for history and suggest how the results of intuition in history may be tested or verified.

The nature of intuition is partly expressed when we say that the talented historian has a bent for his work or that he is able to bring a creative insight to the solving of historical problems. This way of talking is not, of course, exclusive to history; we can speak of the natural scientist in this way -- of his having a gift for his work. To say that the historian requires historical intuition is therefore to say more than this. The concept of intuition becomes clearer when we examine how it is that people "go wrong" in science and in history. It is true that not all people make good scientists, even after they have made serious and lengthy attempts to master the theory; this, however, is an inability to understand how method is put

22. See especially J. S. Bruner: The process of education (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), and E. S. Tauber and M. R. Green: Prelogical experience (New York, 1959).

into practice or to learn completely what it is they are to do. Where it is and how it is that such people have gone wrong is something that can be easily and pointed out by a competent person. When we say of someone that he does not have a bent for mathematics (or physics, or geology), we mean that he has not mastered the method or the theory; his failure to do so is made evident through numerous mistakes that are easily and decisively identifiable at different points in his work. The case with history is quite different. If an individual does not have a bent for historical work -- in this case, that is to say, if he is unable to write a competent historical narrative -- certainly we say that he has been unable to master the technique of writing history; and this too is clear in an examination of the piece of history that he has produced. The inability to be a good historian, however, is not exhaustively manifested by the mistakes to be found in a finished account in the way that the ability to be a good scientist is. Even when all the mistakes in a narrative have been examined and discussed, the critic still wants to say something more: what is left, although it is "correct", still somehow seems wrong. And what may be wrong about a piece of history is not simply to be found in the isolated mistakes of the description of different events or their explanation, but in the whole conception of the narrative. The inability to be a good historian (as with some other pursuits, like philosophy) is made evident not only through making too many mistakes

at different points in the historical account, as is the case with science -- it is also to be found in a general faultiness of the very structure of the account, that is to say, in a faultiness of understanding regarding the relational meaning of different elements of the narrative, or the way people behave or behaved, or the general conceptual structure of a historical period; or it may be found in a defective coherence or interpretation, or in an unsoundness created by a thesis that is untenable or even incredible, or by an attempt to make a point about past events that is nothing short of fanciful. So it is that a historian who is substantially accurate with respect to facts and small-scale factual description and explanation may never be a first-rate historian, although he is a competent research scholar, simply because he is unable to achieve that use of intuition which is essential to historical understanding and a grasp of the whole rather than merely of discrete facts.

When a historical narrative seems unsatisfactory to the critic, it can be much harder to determine completely just how a historian has gone wrong. The solution to the problem of how he has done so is often to be found in the narrative as a whole: the very conception of the narrative is itself defective. The defects of an account can only be brought to light in this case, not by pointing out that the historian has gone wrong at this point, and at that point, and at this other point, and so forth, but by a comprehensive and constructive criticism of both the

particular narrative and its subject. That is to say, just as the single mistake is corrected by a supplying of the true statement, so the faulty narrative may only be finally corrected by the exposition, through a very extensive criticism, of what amounts to the true account. A further emphasis to the point that it is the account as a whole which must be considered in history is given when we remember that not infrequently historians do not accept other historical accounts unless they have "worked through" the subject themselves. As Louis O. Mink has written:

> Historians generally do not adopt one another's significant conclusions unless convinced by their own thorough inspection of the argument.[23]

The difficulties inherent in an account of intuitive historical thinking, or, more precisely, the difficulties of giving a precise and explicit elucidation of historical methodology and its application in interpretation and understanding, often seem to be working against the possibility of objectivity in history. Yet an intuitive process of thought is one ongoing requirement in the work of the historian, one which concerns his whole method and which must coexist with an analytic and logical way of reasoning about the elements of a historical account and their explanations. The historian needs intuition throughout his work, but he will need it the more when he moves away from a "pure" description (at least as that is theoretically possible) towards a discussion, in some of their aspects, of the "how" and the "why" of events.

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23. Op. cit., 179.

It must be remarked that the importance of intuitive thinking in history can lead certain individuals, especially historians, to make a type of extreme statement which would result in intuition being accepted as almost the only way of thinking in history. For example, Professor Trevor-Roper says: 'History has its rules, but they are not "scientific": they are tentative and conditional like the rules of life.'[24] Such an extreme statement is a reflection of the "scientific" extreme: the realization of the importance of covering laws in history can lead to an assertion that the covering-law model is the only acceptable model of historical explanation; and a statement like Trevor-Roper's may well be nothing more than an overreaction to "scientific" statements about history. Such extreme and categorical assertions, whether by historians or philosophers, should not be disregarded: understood as having a partial rather than complete application, they can be very informative and helpful in understanding written history.

All the same, it is with the "rules of life", with the everyday understanding of common sense, that intuitive thinking is intimately connected. A common-sense way of thinking has an importance and centrality in historical work such as it can seldom have in scientific work. It is the "rules of life", as he has come to know them, which finally enable the historian to understand human beings in human situations.

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24. "The past and the present", Past and Present, 42 (February, 1969), 4.

The historian seeks to make comprehensible accounts of human situations and the roles of the persons involved in them. To talk of persons and situations is to refer to two principal aspects of history in which intuition is involved. I intend in the pages that follow to give a brief description of the two types of historical intuitive thinking -- rational intuition and situational intuition.

6. Two types of intuition

What is never to be forgotten in any discussion of history is the way in which individuals' thoughts figure largely in the events of the past considered historically; so many (although by no means all) historical events involved the conscious actions of different persons. To achieve a proper historical understanding of the past, we must understand these individual human actions themselves and not simply their effects; and a full understanding of actions requires an attempt to discover the thoughts of the agent. It is plain that rational explanation and understanding are important in history; but, as I pointed out in the last chapter, it should not be thought of as the necessarily predominant or characteristic way of explaining and understanding history.

From the beginning I should make clear the distinction between rational explanation and rational intuitive understanding. Both concepts, of course, involve the "thought-side" of actions -- intentions, desires, hopes,

and fears, for example. The distinction between the two can be simply brought out by showing that when rational explanation answers a question such as "Why did X do such-and-such a thing?" the answer "Because he wanted to achieve such-and-such an aim" will be based on explicit and generally accepted evidence regarding X's ambitions; whereas when rational intuition is brought to bear on questions like "What was X's aim?" to which the answer cannot be directly found in any explicit evidence, the historian still finds himself able to make some very cogent statement about X's aims.

Rational intuition is what is often referred to by some writers as "empathy": "empathy" properly means an actual identification with, usually, one individual, but the efficaciousness of such a process in history does not depend, for example, as it does for Collingwood (who does not use the word "empathy" itself) and others, on the historian's thinking what Caesar was thinking before he crossed the Rubicon, although this may certainly contribute to it. There can be no dispute that rational intuition frequently derives from a more general identification with a historical period and its characters. As Higham has written:

> No amount of scientific analysis or synthesis can take the place of that crucial act of human empathy by which the historian identifies himself with another time and place, re-enacting the thoughts and reliving the experience of people remote from himself.[25]

The importance of rational explanation and its intuitive

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25. John Higham: History (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 143.

elements (although they are not explicitly identified as such) is also clearly indicated by Dray:

> To understand a human action ... it is necessary for the inquirer somehow to discover its "thought-side"; it is not sufficient merely to know the pattern of overt behaviour. The historian must penetrate behind appearances, achieve insight into the situation, identify himself sympathetically with the protagonist, project himself imaginatively into his situation. He must revive, re-enact, rethink, re-experience the hopes, fears, plans, desires, views, intentions, &c., of those he seeks to understand. To explain action in terms of covering law would be to achieve, at most, an external kind of understanding. The historian, by the very nature of his self-imposed task, seeks to do more than this.[26]

The general attitude expressed in these passages regarding the understanding of thoughts as well as the description of overt actions in history is quite in accord with the theory of rational intuition that I wish to put forward. Most importantly, however, it needs to be noted -- and this is a point brought out by much of the philosophical discussion which generally goes under the heading of "the problem of other minds"[27] -- that the everyday understanding of another person's thoughts and hopes and fears and desires, as this is commonly accepted, does not require that we in some way "step into his shoes" or even "get inside his mind", as is suggested when it is said that the historian should "penetrate behind appearances" or "project himself imaginatively". The historian need not set out vainly to achieve a more rigorous understanding of

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26. W. H. Dray: Laws and explanation in history (Oxford, 1957), 119.

27. See especially John Wisdom: Other minds (Oxford, 1952), and J. L. Austin: "Other minds", in Philosophical papers (Oxford, 1961).

another person's thoughts than that which turns out to be eminently suited to the situations of everyday life.

The intuitive element in the concept of empathy is recognized by many writers, for one of the most basic and common criticisms of its use in history, and the social sciences too, is that it is a "methodological dodge", an attempt to create an adequate explanation where there is what would ordinarily be considered to be inadequate substantiation for the explanatory claims of the historian. And there is the additional criticism that empathetic understanding by itself does not constitute knowledge. Ernest Nagel writes that

> the fact that the social scientist, unlike the student of inanimate nature, is able to project himself by sympathetic imagination into the phenomena he is attempting to understand, is pertinent to questions concerning the origins of his explanatory hypotheses but not to questions concerning their validity. His ability to enter into relations of empathy with the human actors in some social process may indeed be heuristically important in his efforts to invent suitable hypotheses which will explain the process. Nevertheless, his empathic identification with those individuals does not, by itself, constitute knowledge. The fact that he achieves such identification does not annul the need for objective evidence, assessed in accordance with logical principles that are common to all controlled inquiries, to support his imputation of subjective states to those human agents.[28]

Both sorts of criticism fail to comprehend that empathetic understanding is a type of understanding that does not and could not set out to conform to the norms of scientific explanation. "Projection", for example, is not a sort of amateurish way of discovering the generality that

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28. "The subjective nature of social subject matter", in Readings in the philosophy of the social sciences, ed. May Brodbeck (New York, 1968), 44.

underlies the particular instance: it is not a way of coming about a covering law that could be reached more surely by a more scientific and regular approach. Empathetic understanding is based on objective evidence: intuitive reasoning derives from the objective world as much as does scientific explanation. The evidence, however, stands in a different relation to a logical and analytic explanation than to an intuitive grasp of a situation. Thus, as Dray argues, it is wrong to hold that to allow the legitimacy of empathy is 'the granting of a licence to eke out scanty evidence with imaginative filler'.[29] Both rational intuition and situational intuition are subject to tests, even if they cannot be subjected, as scientific explanations can be, to a type of analytic verification. And after an examination of situational intuition, I shall suggest in what way the results of a historian's intuitive reasoning can be subjected to tests.

Situational intuition is principally required by the historian on account of the indisputable and irreducible complexity of historical events. It is indeed the complexity of history that is one of the roots of the problems connected with the concept of explanation in history. Any historical event is both itself complex, and part of a greater complex whole; history cannot be seen as a mere conjoining of simple events. Covering-law theory rests at least partly on the supposition that if a historical event is broken down into its (presumed) "constituent elements",

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29. Op. cit., 129.

the historian will be able to see causes and effects which can be analysed and dealt with as if they existed simply as a sort of historical equivalent of individual atomic facts. Thus, if the historian has these simple events to examine, he will be able to distinguish some that are merely "prevailing conditions" or "attendant circumstances" or the "context" of discrete events, some that are truly of an active causal nature -- perhaps necessary, perhaps sufficient, conditions -- some that could have been different with no relevant or significant change in the circumstances as a whole, and some which, if they had been different, might have changed the whole course of historical events.[30] Through analysis simple particular events could be seen as similar to those of other times and places, and members accordingly of one or another general class. While the complex event cannot be subsumed under some generality, the event broken down into simpler elements may be examined as it can be understood to fall under several relevant generalizations. The practical realization of such an ideal analysis must remain for the

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30. My use of such language is not intended to imply any philosophical position regarding the development of history. "Changing the course of history" is a phrase that is often encountered in discussions of the past; it is a better expression than "changing history", a phrase that is also met with, but it is difficult to know exactly what it is supposed to mean. Except with the "accident-theory" of historical explanation, where course-changing events are obviously conceivable, any event, since it is held that it can be explained fully in terms of its antecedents, must be part of the "course of history"; the same must be held to be the case with respect to the effects of that event, for they must also be amenable to a satisfactory explanation. Of course, "changing the course of history" is a figure of speech; but this is something that should not be forgotten.

most part an unattainable goal: it is not the case that the integral complexity of a historical event can be broken down into smaller units, while still retaining in these smaller units the significance that belongs to the whole in its integrity. The historical whole is not simply the sum of discrete simple events: it also includes the relations existing between its different elements, and the events of written history embrace in addition the historian's valuation and evaluation of them. The result is that, as he studies the past,

> the historian tries to understand a complex process as a function of its component events plus their interrelationships (including causal relationships) plus their importance, all interpreted in a larger context of change.[31]

The historical whole is a complex, and it is only genuinely considered and understood as a whole. The scientist will frequently abstract, because it is the abstracted and simplified situation in which he is interested for theoretical purposes. The historian will not abstract, except on comparatively rare occasions, because it is the concrete, individual situation with which he is concerned, and he is potentially interested in every feature of that situation in itself and not, like the scientist, in each feature only in so far as it may affect his general scheme.

It is the case in everyday life that explanation is regularly obliged to deal with complex situations. It is important to remember, as I have pointed out in my discussion of explanations in history, that explanation can

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31. Mink: op. cit., 182.

take several forms, or -- to put it in another way -- that the word "cause", in history as in common sense and the language of everyday life, is not as precise in its use as it is in the physical sciences; a question "Why?" may not be seeking an answer in terms of a scientific causation at all. In addition to bearing in mind this loose, common-sense application of the concept of cause, we must also remember the common way of selecting causes in everyday life; as Patrick Gardiner points out:

> Common sense is selective; and it selects as the causes of events those features that can be utilized for their production (or, alternatively, prevention). And so, when a causal statement of this type is made, it is not supposed that it will always hold in all possible circumstances, or that the cause mentioned is the "true" or the "real" cause in the sense of excluding the relevance of any other conditions. ... [T]he condition chosen as the "cause" [is] only one among many conditions that [are] also relevant. What we choose to regard as the cause of an event is largely dependent upon its practical value.[32]

Although the historical and common-sense concept of cause is less precise and harder to define than the scientific concept, it should not on that account be regarded as a concept that is inferior to the scientific concept.

The everyday and historical concept of cause can be used in a way which means that there is a kind of true, but implicit, generalization lying behind its use. Even so, to say that the everyday use of cause can involve an implicit generalization should not be understood to mean that whenever we talk of a "cause" we are always referring to generalizations that in some fashion are held "ready

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32. The nature of historical explanation (Oxford, 1952), 11.

for use" somewhere, perhaps, "in the backs of our minds". The generalization that we "use" is implicit in the familiarity of a situation; if we find an everyday sort of explanation convincing, it is often because it appeals to our familiarity with certain sorts of situation. In this connection it will be worthwhile to quote Gardiner once again; as he clearly states, the element of familiarity present in everyday explanation

> is important, because there is always a tendency to over-intellectualize the implications of our ordinary speech, and this in turn is liable to lead to the belief that much of our thinking and reasoning is more systematic and formalized than it really is. There are cases where, it is true, generalizations are brought out into the open, but on the commonsense level this is the exception rather than the rule, and it depends on the complexity or recondite character of the explanation provided.[33]

However, between the explicit generalizations and covering laws of science and the informal and implicit generalizations and familiarities of everyday life and much of history there lies a greater difference than Gardiner appears to believe in his discussion of them. It should be plain that many explanations placed in the category of "informal" generalizations -- but not all, for the genuineness of some as examples of the use of covering laws can be straightforwardly made explicit -- should not be thought of as similar or closely related to precise and explicit generalizations. They are in fact quite distinct and belong not to some branch of covering-law theory but rather to what I should call "situational intuition". The

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33. Ibid., 26.

recognition of familiarity and the perception of "relevant aspects" in a situation are given to us not through analytic explanation but through an intuitive understanding of a situation as a whole. As Maurice Mandelbaum writes:

> The psychological processes of historical understanding may present problems of significance to the psychologist, but, from the point of view of experience, there can be no doubt that we possess the power to apprehend the connections between events. This understanding is implicit not merely in academic historical works, but in many of the common experiences of everyday life.[34]

It is misleading, however, to talk of apprehending "connections" as if they were actually there in the real world. For intuition, strictly, these are neither imposed on events by the mind nor perceived as objectively existent. What provides the apprehension of a connection is not the perception of a historical situation as consisting of linked but separate events, but the perception of a course of events in the wholeness that it really possesses. What is present in actuality is not a connection but a continuity; the use of a term like "connection" may ensure that we continue to conceive of a historical situation as consisting of events that are in some way atomistically discrete.

It may be granted that once familiar or relevant aspects of a historical situation are known the situation may be subsumed under some general type, but in an analytic description alone there is no indication how such aspects are selected out of the considerable complexity of

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34. The problem of historical knowledge (New York, 1967), 271.

history. In the case of a good number of historical situations they may be seen as familiar or unfamiliar quite clearly according to the aspects under which they are examined; and relevance or irrelevance will be determined by a consideration of the outcome of events. Familiarity or relevance, therefore, is not the result of an analysis of certain events or certain personalities; rather, analysis can take place only when familiarity is recognized or relevance seen. Logically, the historian realizes that such-and-such an event is familiar and then examines how it is familiar; in actuality, the two processes will probably occur together. The character of the whole is grasped before it can be analysed; therefore such an analysis cannot be held even to be implicit in the comprehension of the whole. It is a talent for recognizing familiarity, relevance, and resemblances in the whole that marks out the first-rate historian.

The concept of intuitive reasoning itself cannot be satisfactorily analysed. Indeed, if it could be, it would cease to be intuitive; that is to say, once the "stages" or "elements" of such reasoning had been made explicit, it would become another type of logical, quasi-scientific reasoning. If intuitive reasoning could be explicitly described, it would then become possible for it to be used in an explicit, logical way; but intuition is by its nature implicit in a mode of reasoning, and therefore <u>cannot</u> be made explicit, even for purely theoretical purposes of analysis. If intuition does exist, then it must remain unanalysable.

It is evident that there are many examples of understanding in history where the character of the whole is grasped in a certain way before the parts of that whole are analysed; that is, the analysis of a situation, say, by a particular historian is made in terms of its whole character as he has comprehended it: if the whole situation had been grasped in another way, a different analysis, although not necessarily a conflicting one, would have come about. The individual historian's intuitive grasp of a historical situation as a whole, as it is made evident in his understanding of that situation, leads to an analysis of it in terms of certain particular features; it is not, in many cases, a process of logical reasoning, whether implicit or explicit, based on an analysis of particular features, that leads the historian to a conclusion about the situation as a whole. Simply considered, the historian often says to himself something like "This situation I am looking at is familiar to me"; and then he goes on to ask himself "How is it a familiar situation?" He does not examine the elements of a historical situation and then conclude that the situation as a whole is familiar. The recognition of familiarity is a spontaneous, immediate, total occurrence (although it may sometimes be delayed, just as our recognition of a face as familiar may only happen when it has been studied for a while). Indeed, as with one's recognition of persons, that "sense of familiarity" may be lost in a consideration of discrete elements separately. Familiarity inheres in the whole.

The understanding that comes with situational intuition is often grounded in familiarity. Familiarity is grasped immediately in the whole and can only be subjected to analysis later. Simple familiarity, as that is commonly understood, is based on the surface features of a historical situation, but it is a kind of familiarity too that often leads to the perception of relevant aspects in a situation; to see the relevant aspects of a situation often depends on the recognition of the underlying complex structure of a situation. A type of generalization is present here, in so far as the structure of any situation is something abstracted and not concrete. Nevertheless, the abstracted structure will not necessarily be seen in terms of some model under which it may be subsumed as an instance. Rather, the abstract structure will be holistically comprehended as similar (but only rarely identical) to the structure of another situation. The concepts of relevance and familiarity as they apply to history have their foundation in the extensive historical knowledge of the historian, and they are to be understood in terms of a (loose) similarity between historical situations and not in terms of an abstracted and generalized identity.

Situations can only, as a rule, resemble each other to a degree that falls short of identity, because as essentially complex wholes none of their parts (which possibly have significance) may be eliminated by the historian in the name of some theory in an effort to create identity between the skeletal situations that are left.

Many details may later be found to be relevant when at the beginning they did not seem inherently to be of the sort that should have had a bearing on events; and no historical situations are alike in every detail. The unique complexity of a historical situation must frequently be understood holistically and intuitively, and so is not to be considered really subsumable under some general law.

7. The confirmation of the results of intuition

The arguments of historians that are based on an intuitive process of reasoning cannot be subjected to the same sort of logical verificatory analysis as "scientific" arguments; that is to say, many explanatory historical arguments resist the analysis that will substantiate them in a scientifically satisfactory way. Such arguments cannot be made to conform, even implicitly, to a pattern of so-called standard scientific explanation. Naturally, this has been seen as a source of weakness by those who feel that scientific methods, and the way in which the results of scientific methods are verified, are the only way of establishing statements with any general claim to factuality and objectivity. Many historical arguments, of course, will be found to conform implicitly to a scientific norm; but it will be clear that the historian did not have a scientific pattern of inductive reasoning as either a basis or an aim in his own way of thinking. A scientific pattern will often be seen in this type of

historical explanation only when the whole argument has been set down and may thus be comprehensively reinterpreted. Naturally, those that have a "scientific" pattern of argument implicit in them can be verified in a "scientific" fashion. But when a historian gives to his readers an account that contains a non-scientific, fully intuitive understanding of events, irreducible to any scientific pattern, how may the details of that intuitive argument be confirmed?

I wish to contend that many historical "explanations" are not to be subjected to any rigorous logical analysis, except as it is necessary to show that the historian's arguments are properly coherent. The understanding of the historian is to be verified in another way, in many cases, not so much as true or false but as better or worse. According as it is confirmed or disconfirmed, an account and the understanding of events it presents will be more, or less, probable. The historian's interpretation, his arguments, his linkings of events, his imputations of motives and so on, will not be verified or falsified by examining the historian's immediate arguments, but by examining particulars in the actual past which the historian does not seem to have considered directly or at all. In essence, the testing of a historian's arguments is not carried out by a possible scientific process of verification, by means of a rigorous logical analysis of the historian's reasoning; they are tested by looking for corroboration from instances which the historian, who is

necessarily selective and cannot consider all the evidence, has not been able to take note of. Perhaps, with regard to tests, this is the closest history may come to the testing of scientific hypotheses through the repetition of experiments. In the historical instance, the historian's intuitive explanations and hypotheses are put to the test by seeing whether they do apply to circumstances in the actual historical situation to which they should apply. If the historian argues for example that so-and-so was a cruel individual and cites certain instances of behaviour that support his contention, instances of behaviour to which he has not referred must also bear up his argument or at least not seem to falsify it. Many historical interpretations and explanations stand or fall not on the logical basis of their formulation (for there may not be such a logical basis as that term is ordinarily understood) but on their functional applicability to events and situations and behaviour that they are supposed to cover. Obviously, in science too a functional applicability is necessary for the acceptance of a certain hypothesis; but a logically inductive basis is always required of scientific hypotheses even if the formulation of an empirical argument according to the terms of the underlying inductive theory or of a complex theory in terms of simpler principles should follow the idea of how things are to be explained (for intuition and insight have their place in science too).

It is true to say that hypotheses in scientific work are not often simply the result of a process of logical

induction and generalization, that, rather, the theory can be prior to any confirming observations. Popper, for example, sees the confirmatory function of observations as their primary function in science: observations help us to test our theories and to eliminate those which fail to stand up to tests.[35] Certainly, with regard to history, as Goldstein writes:

> The historical reconstruction is not inferred from the facts (as is commonly suggested) but is postulated to explain the facts.[36]

The important difference between science and history here is that at some point a statement couched in terms stipulated by inductive theory is required of the scientist as it is not required of the historian. And, in science, if a proffered "explanation" consistently cannot be supported by an adequate (scientifically acceptable) theory in addition to confirming observations, it becomes suspect.[37] For historians, however, confirming instances together with an examination of the original argument are usually enough for the acceptance of most explanations and interpretations.

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35. Cf., for a brief statement, The poverty of historicism (London, 1957), 97-98. Popper, it may be mentioned, discounts inductive generalizations in science too readily; clearly the scientist may be stimulated to form a theory, through consistently observed regularities, which will be an inductive generalization about those regularities. Such theories do not form a major concern for most historians though.

36. Leon J. Goldstein: "The inadequacy of the principle of methodological individualism", Journal of Philosophy, 55 (1956), 474.

37. For believers in psychical phenomena this may seem to be the case with, for example, extra-sensory perception. A body of apparent confirming observations is unsupported by a scientifically acceptable explanatory theory.

In his examination of another historian's argument, a historian will almost necessarily think about possible confirming (or falsifying) instances, since he will be comparing that historian's knowledge and interpretation of a period with his own, and his own knowledge will differ significantly in detail. But historians are generally unperturbed by any lack of explicitly stated supportive logical theory.

The reasoned logical argument is not often required of a historian even when it is implicitly present in the formulation of his argument. What is most often demanded of his argument is that it should be credible; and credibility regarding explanation and understanding in history is to be found not so often in an argument that is developed in a sound, logical way as in an account that gives the widest and deepest explanatory coverage of events. For the scientist's evaluation of an argument -- no matter how the hypothesis first came into being -- the key question is "Is this argument well grounded in general theoretical principles and proper inductive methods?" while, for the historian's evaluation of his subject, the key question is quite a different one: "Does this argument work?" The historian's argument is justified by its functional applicability to further detailed considerations about the situation which first gave rise to it.

8. The role of values in historical understanding

Any account of historical understanding must take into consideration the place of values in history. Values have been treated in detail already.[38] It is necessary here only to give what amounts to a recapitulation of what was said and to make some additional comments.

The role of values in understanding depends to some extent on their evocation of a certain sympathy on the part of the reader, on their creation of a measure of agreement between the reader's value-scheme and the historian's. To be fully effective, the historian's valuation will find itself mirrored in that of the reader. In this regard, historical understanding comes to depend on what I have called value-alignment between historian and reader.

As I pointed out when I was writing about relativism, if the historian's values and the reader's values are similar, that is to say, if they are in alignment, the historian's full account will be accepted; if the two sets of values are quite incompatible, the account, bearing as it does a valuation interwoven with fact, will be rejected as presenting an integrated understanding of the whole. Since valuation is essential to historical understanding, the historian's account, to be fully understood by a reader, must be accepted as a whole, that is, including its valuational structure.

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38. See above, chap. IV.

Values are necessary for historical understanding because, quite simply, an account deliberately stripped of any values in pursuance of a false objectivity would not be a historical account. History is about man in his social life, who lives and who is understood not through facts alone but through values; any value-less account would at its best be simply a rather bizarre example of the more extreme sort of behaviourism. "Social man" is a concept that depends for its completeness on the world of values, and, of course, especially on moral values. For the immediate problem here, whether the values are those of the period studied or those of the historian's society or come from another time and place altogether is not an important question; in the context of understanding, values may be considered simpliciter. I have already shown, I hope, that values do not in principle compromise historical objectivity, for objectivity in history is an objectivity of fact; an objectivity of value is not conceivable.[39] The facts of history are objective, but its values cannot be, since values are always and essentially mediated through the individual. Although there cannot be an objectivity of value, values do contribute to the creation of historical understanding; thus through values historical understanding comes to share in an essential individuality.

Values play a part in historical understanding as they play a part in the understanding of everyday life.

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39. See above, chap. III, sect. 7, and chap. IV, sects. 4 and 7.

As one cannot conceive of understanding those everyday situations in which we take an active part in a manner which excludes values from contributing to our understanding, so, because historical situations share in the same social quality as those situations in which we find ourselves involved in the present, they may often not be understood unless values are allowed to enter into the accounts that are given of them. History is centred on the concept of man in his social being: that this concept depends on a world of value as well as a world of fact is a point that hardly needs to be laboured. That values are implicit in social life has been recognized by philosophers even if, as happens in some theories, they may suggest that moral and other valuational concepts of human and social life are not innate and derive only from a need to hold society together. Psychologists and sociologists, however, hold it to be an empirical fact that by their nature men are not indifferent to the world and do not stop with a sheerly factual view of their experience.[40] Any human conceptual scheme entails that, whether they do it implicitly or not, men are continually regarding things as good or bad, as pleasing or displeasing, as desirable or hateful, as virtuous or vicious. And philosophers have pointed out that valuational activities or activities of feeling are specifically man's activities, that is to say, activities that give man his unique place in the world; the consequence is that in any account of man feeling as

40. Cf. Wolfgang Köhler: The place of value in a world of facts (London, 1939).

well as thought must be given its rightful place. As Cassirer has written:

> Sociability as such is not an exclusive characteristic of man, nor is it the privilege of man alone. But in the case of man we find not only, as among animals, a society of action but also a society of thought and feeling. Language, myth, art, religion, science are the elements and the constitutive conditions of this higher form of society. They are the means by which the forms of social life that we find in organic nature develop into a new state, that of social consciousness.[41]

In fine, human social life is to be seen as dependent on the activities of thought and feeling; it involves both reasoning with facts and judging with values. Values must be considered necessary to history because it has as its subject human social life; both the historian and his reader are members of society, and, in consequence, the presence of values in a historical account is inescapable. The most perfect historical understanding (from the valuational point of view) will occur when the values implicit in the historian's interpretation concur with the values of the reader; the reader will be shown the facts in terms of his own values, and will thus be able to concentrate directly on the historical facts themselves and on what the historian is saying about them. This state of affairs may be considered to exemplify the purest form of value-alignment -- an important feature of historical understanding where values are involved to any great extent in a historical narrative. Values frequently provide a significant contribution to historical understanding, not simply because history is about man's social life and

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41. Ernst Cassirer: An essay on man (New Haven, 1945), 223.

consequently about values, but also because it is written and read by man with a social consciousness and fully as a social being. As information history tells an individual about the past, and he must relate this -- even if he does so unconsciously -- to his own social and cultural past through his social self. History is not simply a study of social life, but, as it is written and read, it is an expression of human social nature; as such an expression it may adopt all the values that are commonly adopted in social life. The understanding of history is not a simply passive reading of past facts and values, but an active expression of an attitude towards the past. Through values we come to achieve that full understanding which is present in a genuine incorporation of history into our own experience.

9. Interpretation and the historian's thesis

The historian is judged by his general understanding of whatever topic he has chosen for himself, as this is given in the finished account which he presents to his public. This understanding is most often attained through what is fundamentally an intuitive grasp of the situation as a whole; the historian's intuition will be finally determined by his own individual experience of life and his own individually developed historical knowledge. In consequence, the understanding of his topic that the historian achieves will in many points as well as in the

whole be an individual and personal one; where explanations of a scientific type are in evidence these will often be purely supportive of the historian's individual thesis.

The individual understanding manifested in a particular historical account is based on an interpretation of historical facts. Interpretation itself embraces several of the historian's activities. The historian will interpret facts through his valuation of them: his attitudes towards the historical individuals and occurrences that he studies will affect the way in which he sees the factual details of the past, and his selection and arrangement of them, for they will be seen to fit, or not to fit, some particular form of explanation. Facts will also undergo evaluation: they will be seen as significant or unimportant, as "key" events, as symptomatic of general tendencies, as strange, unexpected aberrations, as mere irrelevancies. And interpretation will sometimes also involve the hypothesizing of facts. The way in which facts are seen and interpreted will to a significant extent be summed up in, and indicated by, what I call the historian's "thesis", which may be described as the statement containing the point the historian wishes to make about his subject-matter or the way in which the historian believes the events of his narrative should be seen. The thesis will indeed both express the historian's attitude to the events as a whole and be indicative of how events and personalities may be seen in detail. It is the

thesis of the historian that "sums up" the historian's understanding. A thesis is not necessarily explicitly referred to in a narrative, nor need the historian even be conscious of it as such. It is a type of general, summative statement about the historian's subject which results from the historian's individual approach and which can be derived from his account if we choose to do so.

If it is understood that in many historical accounts the historian presents his readers with a particular thesis about his topic, the difficulties about objectivity initially presented by individual determinants that apparently have such an important place in interpretation should begin to disappear. The historian's thesis is bound to relate only to certain facts, to certain situations, events, and individuals in the period or region or topic which is under examination. In many cases where we may be concerned that objectivity is compromised by the historian's selectivity, for example, it is to be realized that we are looking at the past, not (simply) "as it was", but in the light of the historian's individual understanding. Within the bounds of the historian's understanding there is no bar to an inquiry being objective. Objectivity does not entail that the historian presents an account that is all-inclusive, even in a representative way; such an account is not what we require of the historian at all. The subject-matter of history is already defined in such a way as to be extensively selective from all the potential subject-matter the world provides. And within history we

allow a historical account to be selective with regard to period, area and discipline with no fears that objectivity may be damaged by such selectivity. The historian's individual understanding is one more way in which the orientation of a historical account is determined; and much of the subject-matter of history is in its very nature especially amenable to the individual understanding. The events of the past are not merely open to being seen in different lights: they are profitably to be seen in different lights. And they are profitably to be seen thus, not in the sense of the lessons of history, nor in Meiland's idea of "triangulation" where objectivity is achieved through a sort of "balancing-out" of different accounts, but through that deeper understanding of both the present and the past which comes from seeing the same events in different relations and from different points of view.

The historian's thesis, whether it is implicit or explicit in his account, often presents us with a unique understanding of a particular set of events. The set of events the historian chooses will in itself be unique as a set, and unique in its interpretation. The uniqueness of each historical account -- a uniqueness given to it by the individuality of its author -- does not exclude objectivity. The historian's understanding of a set of historical events is not a type of inferior "subjective" understanding that may be compared with some superior "objective" understanding. The understanding of history has always to be mediated through the understanding of individuals or of a group

of individuals. It could not be otherwise. An interpretation of events cannot be something that is factually inherent in the events themselves. Of course, events already are usually presented to the historian with some interpretation, created at least by the understanding of the contemporaries of those events; but the inadequacy of a contemporary understanding of events has previously been made clear. And, in pursuance of objectivity, the events of the past cannot be taken in some "physical" way; on a purely factual level, as purely physical occurrences, the events of the world are quite meaningless historically, for it is only the understanding of individuals that can give them meaning.

The "real truth about the past", if this is meant to refer not simply to factual description but to an interpretation that might somehow have the same status as that description, or might be derived deductively from it, is an impossibility. The understanding of the past is carried out by individuals in their own terms. The relativists are correct when they say that written history always relates to the historian and his society; but they are wrong when they say that it is only valid for that historian and society. As Frankel has observed:

> [W]hen historians of a later age write history in terms of terminal consequences that are different from those with which their predecessors were concerned, they are not rewriting history, they are writing another history. The old history can also be true, and true not only for the earlier age in which it was written but for the later age as well.[42]

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42. Charles Frankel: "Explanation and interpretation in history", in Theories of history (ed. Gardiner), 421.

The interpretation and understanding of history must be related to the individual's personal and present understanding; they must be related to the way in which a man is accustomed to understand his world. The relativist's ideal of objectivity seems often to tend towards some transcending comprehension of historical events, above any localizing limits of time or place. But a historical account made by some omniscient and perfect being would not be objective history, it would be a meaningless account, since in transcending human understanding, it would come to signify nothing for man.

When it is based on sound knowledge and factual truth and is coherent in argument, the individual's interpretation of history is all that there can be in the way of interpretation. Collaborative work does not eliminate the individual and provide us with a better interpretation; it is in history nothing more than the work of a group of individuals. There can be no other historical interpretation of the past that is at any rate valid for man than the interpretation that is specific to some time or place. Objective history reaches its limits with factual truth and factual explanation; and these are not its practical limits alone, but its logical limits. When such factual objectivity has been attained, it can be contained undiminished within the individual historian's interpretive account; and it is the interpretive account, the historical narrative, which makes mere factual objectivity into history proper. There can be no "real truth about the past"

in a historical account, for there is simply no "real truth" of understanding in the past for the historian to discover and give to us. As Raymond Aron states:

> History cannot give a final, universally valid account of societies, epochs and extinct civilizations, for the very reason that they never had a unique and universally valid significance.[43]

The "real understanding" of any part of the world of man's past is that personal understanding which mediates it most effectively to us.

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43. "Relativism in history", in The philosophy of history in our time, ed. Hans Meyerhoff (Garden City, N.Y., 1959), 160.

IX

HISTORY AS LITERATURE

1. The artistry of the historical narrative

The typical historical account is a story. Even if it were admitted that the historian was otherwise concerned entirely with analysis, the synthetic aspect of the narrative itself, considered as entire, would still have to be taken note of. The historian who writes a polished and complete work of history thinks about that work as something that possesses an essential unity and develops it accordingly. Whatever the historian's views about explanation and understanding, his work will still require that cohesion which results from his artistic conception of it. If we accurately assess and describe what the historian often does when we talk about his intuitive understanding of a part of the past and his synthetic interpretation of it in terms of a theme or thesis, then we shall see his understanding of history reinforced through the artistic integrity of the narrative as a whole and the way in which that integrity is constituted. Indeed, it will be clear that the final "historical statement" about the facts and the historian's interpretation of them will ultimately depend on the literary form of the account, for this is the way in which the historian's thinking is made known to his readers.

The two predominant "literary" aspects of the historian's work are his use of selection and arrangement, that is, his artistic conception of his work, and his use of language, chiefly his literary style. Of course, both these aspects will be less or more important in any particular work of history according as the work approximates to the monograph of detailed research or to the broad narrative with a wide sweep of events. The tightly-knit article with its closely defined subject will give less scope for a historian's use of his "non-historical" (literary) abilities than the historical work which covers a comparatively large and general topic. In this chapter I shall be concerned almost exclusively with the broader sort of historical work, the sort that is unquestionably a developed narrative and, in the clearest sense, a story. But the problems that I shall be discussing are bound to be present in some degree in any historical work that makes use of language and is presented with a formal unity. Language that is used in an ordered, purposeful, and non-specialized way -- and one significant quality of general historical writing is that its language cannot be specialized[1] -- in order to render to an audience a descriptive or explanatory account requires a cohesion that is determined not only by the elements of its subject-matter but by linguistic and, consequently, stylistic

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1. The historian's lack of any specializing orientation in his use of terms and language has been seen as a defect to be remedied, especially by those who believe that history is (or should be) one of the social sciences. For an advocacy of the concept of specific "historical terms", see Morton White's article "Historical explanation", in Theories of history, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York, 1959).

factors and the needs of expression and communication. The language itself of history ensures that artistic and literary considerations cannot be ignored. Little of what I have to say, it should be noted, implies that the historian is consciously a stylist; arrangement and style possess a literary character in history even though many historians may give little conscious attention to the literary nature of history. Many first-rate historians, nevertheless, and certainly the great English historians of the past have been acutely aware of the relationship of history and literature.

I have made the point previously that history is a story. The purely narrative aspect of the complete account, however, has not previously been given a proper emphasis in this dissertation. Although the conclusions he draws from the narrative aspect of history, and those particularly regarding the function of historical explanation, are questionable, Gallie's comments about the historical narrative in Philosophy and the historical understanding are very perspicacious; they may be quoted here as providing a very satisfactory statement of this important feature of written history. About history as a story Gallie writes that

> narrative is the form which expresses what is basic to and characteristic of historical understanding. Granted that every genuine work of history is also a work of reason, of judgment, of hypotheses, of explanation: nevertheless every genuine work of history displays two features which strongly support the claim that history is a species of the genus Story. To appreciate, and in a proper sense to use, a book or a chapter of history means to read it through; to follow it through; to

> follow it in the light of its promised or adumbrated outcome through a succession of contingencies, and not simply to be interested in what resulted or could be inferred as due to result from certain initial conditions. ... [H]istory, like all stories and all imaginative literature, is as much a journey as an arrival, as much an approach as a result. Again, every genuine work of history is read in this way because its subject-matter is felt to be worth following -- through contingencies, accidents, setbacks, and all the multifarious details of its development. And what does this mean if not that its subject-matter is of compelling human interest, that we must hear more and more fully and accurately what these people really did and failed to do, even if the story of their achievements and failures has to be told in mainly abstract terms that are oddly remote from the lost feelings and gestures and acts of the actual participants?[2]

Gallie, of course, is talking of the lengthy and well-developed narrative, but the shorter monograph and the very much briefer article frequently share the properties of a literary narrative with the longer book; and the same literary considerations will be found to apply to them as to the narrative of book-length.

In many important ways history resembles the more straightforward type of imaginative literature; aspects of the latter that are central to its character are also of considerable significance in historical writing. It can naturally never be forgotten that the happenings of the past are not the creation of the historian in the way that the events of a novel, for example, are the creation of the novelist, and that, as a consequence of this, written history lacks the idealization and stylization of purely imaginative work. In short, truth is quite unequivocally paramount in history. Nevertheless, as I intend to show below, the primacy of truth in historical work does not

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2. (London, 1964), 66-67.

entail that only factual considerations are of consequence, or that, given a close attention to fact, the literary characteristics of the historical narrative will follow on this and are therefore immutable.

Once it is granted that the historical narrative (and especially the broader type of narrative) is clearly and essentially a type of story, the inescapable conclusion is that literary qualities as necessarily belong to the finished work of history as they do to the novel or essay by a self-professed literary author. The historian will be judged not simply by the truth of his facts and the coherence of his interpretation but by the manner in which these are presented by him. With the scientist we are interested in content alone: in the scientific account what matters is those physical facts and theories which the scientist is attempting to convey to us. Our only literary demand is that the language of the account should be clear and not present an obstacle to the communication of a statement of true fact. If the scientist's style is a happy one, if he shows a certain literary aptitude, we naturally appreciate this; nevertheless, in the end we should have no hesitation in saying that the style was immaterial to the subject and could scarcely be allowed to have any bearing on our judgment of the scientist's ability. With the historian, on the contrary, we are interested in form as well as content, in presentation as well as factual truth. Abilities of the historian that might in a strict logical sense be considered as "non-

historical" are relevant to history for the purposes of a final judgment; how well a historian tells his story has a bearing on his analysis of the past in addition to what story it is that he tells. Thus it is that the criticism of a piece of written history as "dull" seems a worthwhile and pertinent comment in a way that the criticism of a scientific account as "dull" could never be. Such a criticism frequently implies that the historian has failed to create or communicate that synthetic understanding which is necessary to a work of history, in this case by failing to awaken or maintain the reader's interest. A historical account that is more than a plain presentation of factual truth and explanation is required of the historian. As E. H. Carr has pointed out:

> To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building. It is a necessary condition of his work, but not his essential function.[3]

The historian has to present clearly and accurately an account that is factually true, but it is not in factual accuracy that is to be found the essence of the historical narrative. The historian is required to create a synthesis, including accurate factual reporting, that has intrinsic interest and value. We expect the historical writer to use his knowledge of factual truth as a step towards the creation of an integrated understanding of events. And it is a literary style which contributes greatly to the formulation and communication of this

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3. What is history? (Harmondsworth, 1964), 10-11.

culminating stage beyond mere presentation of factual truth.

Historians have been conscious of the literary side of their activity. Although, like many historians, he may overstate the case for the consideration of history as a form of literature, A. J. P. Taylor is an example of a historian who sees one of the historian's aims as a literary one, maintaining that the historian must be concerned with the literary qualities of his work:

> Although history may claim to be a branch of science or of politics or of sociology, it is primarily communication, a form of literature. No historian is worth his salt who has not felt some tinge of Macaulay's ambition -- to replace the latest novel on the lady's dressing-table. ... The historian has to combine truth and literary grace; he fails as a historian if he is lacking in either.[4]

It is in the literary qualities of his work that the historian is enabled to bring his individuality fully to the fore. It is in the matter of style and conception that the individual historian finally creates a unique work of history, and a work that is uniquely his own. And just as an artistic statement, the work of art, is a statement of something that is essentially and unquestionably individual in its conception and expression, so the historical statement, the historical narrative, through its necessary literary quality partakes of the individuality of art.[5]

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4. "History in England", in Rumours of wars (London, 1952), 8.

5. To talk in this way of the artistic statement (and the historical statement) being individual is not intended to rule out the possibility of collaborative art. By "individuality" I mean to say that work done by two or three individuals, for example, is an expression of

Individuality therefore becomes something that is not merely possible in history but indeed inevitable in finished historical work. The linguistic "vehicle" of historical work ensures that the historian's individuality will be communicated to his readers in that work, whether or not he consciously wishes it to be. Thus it is evident that the attempt to suppress individuality of expression by a historian will itself be another expression, albeit a perverted one, of individuality.

2. The relationship of fact and style

Before the nature of the literary elements in history is considered, we should be well advised to consider one important problem about the relation of factual truth to literary style in the narrative. If literary style, we may ask, as well as the factual truth of an account is to count in history, which is better historically, the dull but scrupulously careful and truthful account, or the inaccurate but superb piece of literature? It has to be admitted that no precise rules can be laid down for the answering of such a question; rules for the consideration of two works of history in an evaluative comparison cannot be given some simple quantitative formulation regarding either the importance and extent of factual error or the relevance and quality

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those two or three individuals, even through their interaction as a group. By means of collaboration the non-subjective does not become so important that particular authorship is irrelevant.

of literary characteristics. Each comparison of two accounts will be a unique comparison. It can be said, nonetheless, that it should take into account considerations like the following. The paramountcy of truth in history must be understood to refer not only to an accurate truth of fact but also to the depth and extent of interpretation and understanding, as I suggested it might be defined towards the end of the previous chapter. The interpretation of a historical period or topic will depend in large measure, however, on the truths found in the analyses of the descriptions and explanations of particular events. Thus, to a marked extent, truth of fact will be necessarily incorporated into a properly satisfactory interpretation. Even so, a useful and penetrating picture of a historical whole may be seriously inaccurate at some points with regard to details: it may become the sort of historical work that is recommended reading but needs to be approached with caution. Conversely, an account that is highly accurate factually may, as a whole, present an unbelievable and discredited picture of its subject: it may be recommended as a secondary factual source with the warning that the thesis the historian advances in it should be largely disregarded.[6] When, in addition to the problems of comparison presented by considerations like these, one must take account of the literary qualities of the historian's

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6. It should be remarked in passing that closely similar criticisms may be made about many philosophical works, both historical and conceptual. Indeed, the importance of style and conception for philosophy would be well worth an independent, self-contained study.

presentation, all that can be said is that to a question like the one above there can be no answer, and every comparative judgment will be an ad hoc judgment which will take into account not only the different qualities of the narrative but also the purpose to which the narrative is to be put. Assessment of a piece of written history will be based both on factors that are inherent in the narrative and on functional factors that are completely extrinsic to the factual, historical content of a work.[7]

Perhaps the question itself as to which of the two is better, the almost unreadable but accurate narrative or the superbly written but inaccurate one, is misguided, in so far as there cannot be a properly adequate basis for an answer to it: it may well be impossible to weigh style against accuracy in any meaningful way. A choice between the two is not a necessary one for us to make: history does not have to be either accurate or literary. It can and deserves to be both. It would be better to understand the question in a rhetorical way as serving to bring out for us these two important qualities -- of accuracy and of style -- in many historical writings, and as emphasizing how we must take both factors into consideration when we judge a piece of narrative history. Certainly we may feel

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7. It should not be thought that in saying this I am contradicting what I wrote about the purpose of history in chapter II. When I stated that the historian should write history as if that activity were an end in itself I was insisting that those intrusive theoretical purposes which are possible in historical work were to be eschewed. Obviously, practical purposes must be borne in mind by the historian, who will not seek to ignore whether what he is writing is intended as a school textbook or as a contribution to some learned journal.

that regarding the question of style some writers go too far: it is a feature of Roman historiography in general that rhetorical considerations occupied too large a place for a historical account to live up satisfactorily to our modern conception of history; and more recently, a writer like Lytton Strachey seems a good example of an individual whose taste for effect was to the detriment of the history he wrote. Style and accuracy must always be in balance. A piece of writing becomes unsatisfactory as history both when literary style is placed above factual truth and when statements of factual truth are written down with little or no regard at all paid to questions of style. The best history is achieved in that account which communicates accurate statements of fact in a penetrating interpretation through properly stylistic language.

3. The historical synthesis

Owing to the interaction of different aspects of historical work, the problems surrounding the literary and artistic aspects of history, like so many other problems concerning history, lead often to a renewed consideration of other problems. Specifically, however, I shall be concerned here with more or less purely artistic or literary questions: on the one hand, about the selection and arrangement of historical material and the layout and general artistic structure of the narrative; and, on the other hand, about the language and style of the historian

and their expressive connotations in his work. Both these categories of problems have been considered before: selection has been looked at with regard to historical explanation and understanding, and the connotations of language figured prominently in the discussion about the place of value-judgments in history. Here I want to look only at the specifically artistic and literary aspects of these features of history.

It is the literary qualities of history which determine to a significant extent the importance, as it is expressed and understood, of the more easily analysed and separated constituents of a narrative; that is to say, the artistic conception of the historian is the conception of a whole, and it is into this whole that the factual elements of history fit. I have suggested that in many instances the historian is concerned to advance a thesis in his narrative. Since detailed hypotheses about a part of the past (especially if they contain innovative ideas) will be formulated only when the historian has an extensive acquaintance with his topic, this thesis will be substantially derived from the facts of the historical past; but the narrative account which implicitly or explicitly expounds the thesis will be conceived in such a way that the elements of the account that make or support the historian's point will be specially highlighted. And this highlighting of certain factors, and, as a consequence, the successful advancement of the historian's ideas, will depend very much on literary artifice. The genuine

historical content of the account will be reinforced by the purely literary abilities of the historian; and a lack of such abilities will tend to hinder seriously the acceptance of an argument and, indeed, limit the historian's stature in his own field.

In the construction of the literary account, selection and arrangement will share many features of their use in historical writing with their use in purely imaginative writing such as the novel. The dominant feature of the account for critical judgment will be its ability to convince; and written history, like the novel, will be most convincing when the account presents the reader with a description of events that conveys to him an appearance of their inner necessity. To a considerable extent, in fact, the historian is to be found using an approach to his topic that is similar to the approach which a writer like a novelist uses to his own subject. Now, when the historian is compared to the novelist, it is of course important that fact and fiction are not confused. Yet, as has been the case with some writers on the subject, the emphasizing of the distinction between fact and fiction must not be considered enough for it to be asserted that there is nothing more to be said about the relationship between the historical narrative and the novel. That in the historical account great stress is laid on the importance of factual truth, while particular factual truth has nothing whatever to do with the novel, does not entail that the two types of writing have nothing significant in common

and that any comparison of the two can be immediately ruled invalid. When we consider aspects of the historical narrative such as the importance of artistic insight, the arrangement of material, and the aesthetic balance to be created and maintained between different substantive constituents of the account, the distinction between fact and fiction is not one of major importance. Although the historian, so to speak, finds his "plot" already made for him, and so quite obviously must "stick to the facts", the novelist too works under certain constraints. It is true that the novelist is free to create his own story, and the character, events, and situations of that story; but, once they have been created in relatively broad outline, characters and events can only develop in certain strictly defined ways. Writers make this clear when they talk of a story "writing itself" or of characters "developing in their own way"; the development of any story has an inner necessity of its own, and it is this necessity, as it is fulfilled by the author, that renders a story convincing. The quality of being able to follow and develop this artistic necessity successfully is one that distinguishes a good novelist from a bad one. It is the novelist's task to understand the necessity that is inherent in his own plot, and to explain the "how" and the "why" of his characters, events, and situations adequately to his readers.

The artistic necessity of the story is created by the need for verisimilitude: despite the fact that a novel is entirely an imaginative creation of its author, if it

claims to be dealing with ordinary people in an actually possible situation it must still be "true to life". In short, the novelist is circumscribed by the rules of life; the need to discern these rules, and the insight that comes with, and indeed leads to, the ability to discern them is the same for the historian as for the novelist. Only the application of the novelist's insight differs to a certain and, of course, important extent. Indeed, as the good historian and the good novelist are alike in the way in which they have a deep perception of human behaviour and are able to intuit its motivations and consequences correctly, so the bad historian and the bad novelist, faced with the characters and events they are to describe and explain, fail to examine them with sufficient knowledge or insight; they cannot develop or understand them with sufficient depth, and thus they give to their readers an account, whether it is fact or fiction, which is at once quite unconvincing and lacking in interest.

In discussing "artistic insight", the concept of intuition has been brought to notice once again. It is important to realize that intuition has a significant "artistic" aspect in so far as it is connected with the insight of the artist. It is the historian's individual artistic insight and his individual intuitive grasp of past events that lead to the uniqueness of each historical narrative, a uniqueness that is determined by, among other things, the historian's personality and embodies the interaction of that personality with the material of history.

Intuition is not a concept of which the content is characterized by passivity. Intuition is not simply a way of understanding things; it has also an active content which leads to creation. It is through intuition and the grasp it gives him of the whole that the historian is enabled to conceive the structure and arrangement, and the broad lines of selection, to be used for his narrative. That ability which leads him to comprehend the real complexity of the past with some sort of order superimposed, also leads him to conceive as a whole an ordered and complex account of those past events. The broad lines of the selection and arrangement of the historical narrative are conceived in much the same way as the novelist conceives the lines of the selection and arrangement of the elements of his own work.

The wealth of material about the past available gives the historian a real freedom of choice regarding his subject-matter, and an ability to choose a subject in the treatment of which he will be able to express himself satisfactorily. It must be stressed, of course, that this is not always a conscious activity; but it can be readily understood that history is not a discipline in which the historian is frequently compelled to deal with a subject to which he is not amenable. He is therefore under much less constraint with respect to his subject both in its broad outline and in its details than seems commonly to be supposed. He is not compelled to report more or less dispassionately on such-and-such specified events. What he

writes about and the aspects he chooses to write about he selects himself, and this selection is the result of an extensive freedom of choice. Naturally, once his subject has been selected, he will be working under some constraint; but since he has chosen freely something for which he presumably has a certain talent and liking, he can hardly feel it subjectively as constraint. The finished historical synthesis of the narrative will be something which results from the historian's choice of a subject that accords with his own abilities and tastes. Thus, through this accord it will be both a satisfactory expression of the historian's individuality and a satisfactory statement about past events.

The finished narrative of history -- whether it is a lengthy book or a brief article -- thus represents the culmination of a very special type of synthesis. It is not either a sheer account of plain fact on which the character of the narrator never impinges nor a statement of opinion by a historical critic untroubled about his partiality and bias. It is a fusion of a factual account and a personal point of view through, ideally, a deep and balanced interpretation. From the extensive material of history the historian is able to choose and develop a factual account (but always holding to truth) according to his inclinations; and it is the freedom of choice made evident here which provides the first basis for the expression of the historian's point of view and the first step in the interpretation of historical events towards a new historical

synthesis. It is in the successful synthesis of fact and opinion -- a synthesis which is ideally detrimental to neither -- that the true character of history lies.

4. The literary contribution to historical understanding

The selection and arrangement of the content of the narrative is determined not only by the "factual" necessity to present a statement of the truth but by the "artistic" necessity to present the truth in the best way possible and as most satisfactorily supportive of the historian's interpretation of the true facts. The selection and arrangement of details will be at least partly determined by the historian's intuitive conception of the whole but will be consequential on past actuality. Thus, a certain factual necessity underlies the selection and arrangement of historical material within the narrative, but no such necessity can be found in connection with that other important literary aspect of history -- the historian's choice of language and style.

The importance of language and style in history can too easily be ignored. Indeed, arguments that concentrate on making history a full-fledged social science make very little reference to the positive function of literary qualities in history. Of course such arguments could not do so, for they must lay great stress on the achievement in history of a "scientific" objectivity that seeks to do away with the individuality of the author of an account and to

eliminate as far as possible language that is non-factual or not value-neutral. Nevertheless, the subject-matter of history is such that it lends itself readily to an individuality of style, a personal choice of language, and other seemingly non-factual (and supposedly non-informative) literary qualities. Far from being the superfluous result of a rather regrettable habit of many historians (who even in their more self-consciously "scholarly" work hope often to be read and understood by at least a few educated laymen) and, consequently, a feature that is hopefully eliminable from historical work, literary style in history constitutes a considerable aid to historical understanding. (The incidental point may be made that it also lends an attraction to history, so that a reversion to a factual dullness would seem gratuitously perverse.)

We may now look at three important ways in which literary qualities themselves contribute to a better and deeper historical understanding than mere "factuality" could do. The first way in which they do this is through what may generally be called their "setting of the mood". The mood of a narrative gives us an important clue to the historian's outlook, to his general attitude to the events he is narrating, to the sort of interpretation and understanding he has of them, and perhaps it also warns us to be on our guard against any possibly unfair bias in his account. In the following passage the description immediately engages our sympathy for Charles I.

> When King Charles came home from Scotland in the autumn of 1641, London was bright with hangings and the

> fountains ran wine. The November day was overcast and the highway beyond Moorgate was ankle deep in mud, but planks had been laid down to prevent the Royal coach from sticking and to save the shoes of the eminent citizens who had come to welcome their sovereign on his return from Scotland. The Queen and her children met him at Theobalds, and Charles reached the city limits at ten in the morning of November 25th with his wife, his three eldest children, his nephew and the Duchess of Richmond in one cheerful coach load.[8]

Our sympathy is engaged not through a direct approach but through the quintessentially literary technique of drawing a very skilful vignette of what is almost a happy family reunion. In a broader way, by opening her book in this novelistic style, Miss Wedgwood carefully sets the mood of her history and prepares us for those attitudes that she will typically take up throughout her narrative. And correspondingly, a historian may adopt a hostile position and hope to create an unfavourable reaction in his reader by the use of, for example, sarcastic or ironic language. Again, consistent use of such a style implicitly suggests the general scheme of the historian's judgments.

The second way in which literary qualities may give a deeper historical understanding is through the greater power that is possessed by a stylistic illustration of some limited generalization in contrast with that possessed by a mere cold enumeration of instances. The artful contrasts of the following passage make clear to us in an excellent way the general condition of the majority of the people in the seventeenth century.

> In Covent Garden a filthy and noisy market was held close to the dwellings of the great. Fruit women

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8. C. V. Wedgwood: The King's War 1641-1647 (London, 1958), 17.

screamed, carters fought, cabbage stalks and rotten apples accumulated in heaps at the thresholds of the Countess of Berkshire and of the Bishop of Durham.

The centre of Lincoln's Inn Fields was an open space where the rabble congregated every evening, within a few yards of Cardigan House and Winchester House, to hear mountebanks harangue, to see bears dance, and to set dogs at oxen. Rubbish was shot in every part of the area. Horses were exercised there. The beggars were as noisy and importunate as in the worst governed cities of the Continent. A Lincoln's Inn mumper was a proverb. The whole fraternity knew the arms and liveries of every charitably disposed grandee in the neighbourhood, and, as soon as his lordship's coach and six appeared, came hopping and crawling in crowds to persecute him. ...

Saint James's Square was a receptacle for all the offal and cinders, for all dead cats and dead dogs of Westminster. At one time a cudgel player kept the ring there. At another time an impudent squatter settled himself there, and built a shed for rubbish under the windows of the gilded saloons in which the first magnates of the realm, Norfolk, Ormond, Kent, and Pembroke, gave banquets and balls. ...

When such was the state of the Region inhabited by the most luxurious portion of society, we may easily believe that the great body of the population suffered what would now be considered as insupportable grievances. The pavement was detestable: all foreigners cried shame upon it. The drainage was so bad that in rainy weather the gutters soon became torrents. Several facetious poets have commemorated the fury with which these black rivulets roared down Snow Hill and Ludgate Hill, bearing to Fleet Ditch a vast tribute of animal and vegetable filth from the stalls of butchers and greengrocers.[9]

The third way in which literary style may be significant in written history is through its ability to communicate the values and attitudes of the historian. Thus, an individual's action may be described as horrifying, or wicked, or cynical, in terms of value-judgments to which I have drawn attention in a previous chapter; or, it may be described in more oblique terms, but with the same effect. Indeed, in connection with the literary aspect of some

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9. Lord Macaulay: History of England, in The evolution of British historiography, ed. J. R. Hale (London, 1967), 229-30.

historical narrative, it is the obliquely communicated value-judgment with which we should be concerned: communication in this fashion rests on the whole tenor of a passage, rather than on any explicit valuational language or on valuational charges implicit in chiefly factual words. The oblique expression of a judgment or opinion, when it is thoroughly successful, is an exceptional literary talent. Of course, any passage of this kind is almost certain to contain explicit value-judgments. Nevertheless, in the following passage, it can be felt that in conveying the disapproval of the historian the effect of the whole is greater than the effect of the actual words alone that the historian has chosen.

> What followed was a grim page in the annals of Russian literature: Stalin's personal style became, as it were, Russia's national style. Not only was it a daring deed for any publicist or essayist to compose a paragraph or two including no direct quotation from Stalin. The writer took great care that his own sentences should, in style and vocabulary, resemble as closely as possible the quoted text. An indescribably dull uniformity spread over the Russian press and most periodicals. Even the spoken language became "Stalinized" to a fantastic extent, at least when people talked on ideology and politics. It was as if a whole nation had succumbed to a ventriloquial obsession.[10]

The most important feature of literary style is, however, its capacity of fusing many logically different constituents of history; that is to say, the successful historian is able through his style to deal with several quite different logical functions at the same time. The following passage provides a good example of this integrating function of style.

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10. Isaac Deutscher: Stalin: a political biography (Harmondsworth, 1966) 363.

> The city, with a population estimated roughly at half a million, was a densely packed community (broken here and there by the gardens attached to large houses), situated mainly on the north bank of the Thames, and was still officially bounded by its ancient gates: Ludgate and Newgate on the west; Aldersgate, Cripplegate, Moorgate, and Bishopsgate on the north; and Aldgate on the east. Outside of Southwark there was little population south of London Bridge, for Bermondsey, Newington Butts, and Lambeth were villages, while Peckham and Vauxhall were rural resorts. To the north of the old city were the fields round Islington, with their cow-sheds and outhouses; to the east, the Mile End Road became a country lane immediately beyond Whitechapel; to the west, one might walk past gardens as far as Westminster; and farther north, the suburbs did not extend beyond the modern Trafalgar Square and Charing Cross Road. By destroying most of the medieval city, the Great Fire made possible the creation of a new and larger London, with wider streets and spacious squares, such as Bloomsbury and Leicester Squares, and that of Covent Garden (with its porticoes); another breathing space was left in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Already fashion was moving westward, and before the end of the century the aristocratic district of St. James's had come into existence, with its town houses of the nobility. Several bishops, including those of Ely, Gloucester, Lichfield, and Lincoln, still retained official lodgings in the metropolis; at Lambeth and Fulham the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London had their respective head-quarters.[11]

Although this passage is essentially a very basic sort of historical description, and indeed quite typical of the type of account we may imagine when we think of a "descriptive historical narrative", it contains several other features of written history that have been, as one might say, absorbed into the description. There is an example of explanation in the sentence that tells how the Great Fire made possible the creation of a new London; of a limited generalization about the westward movement of fashion; of language that carries implicit values, such as "densely packed", "spacious", "breathing space". Thus,

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11. David Ogg: England in the reign of Charles II (Oxford, 1934), 94-95.

even "ordinary" description carries within it strictly non-descriptive features of history; but the pure description itself shows how important literary ability is in writing history, not simply in the arrangement and order of the description, but in the choice of details that will reinforce the general, comprehensive picture. To emphasize the countrylike aspect of the environs of London, Ogg talks of the 'fields round Islington, with their cow-sheds and outhouses', where other details chosen might be less immediately evocative of the country; similarly, to talk of the Mile End Road becoming a 'country lane' is an exceptionally effective way of stressing a rural atmosphere, because of the stark contrast it suggests with the present-day Mile End Road -- again, other examples of "country lanes" would be less effective illustrations of the nature of London's surroundings in the seventeenth century because the contrast with conditions today would be much less powerful.

To meet the possible criticism that I have selected examples of historical passages by well-known writers who are likely to be consciously more literary than some of their colleagues I have also selected several excerpts from papers and articles in historical journals which will show how style and individuality is present, and significantly so, in lesser works of history. These are presumably not intended to a great extent to have overly literary aspirations, yet language is often used in a way that is literary rather than "scientific".

> The "Irish question" is a convenient term for a concatenation of problems which distressed English politicians, Whig and Tory, Liberal and Conservative, throughout the nineteenth century. Whether it appeared primarily as a constitutional, religious, or economic problem at a particular time, the response to it by English governments invariably involved a delicate balance of coercion and conciliation, the former often vitiating the effectiveness of the latter.[12]

It is worth noting how a literary phrase like 'a concatenation of problems' well conveys the writer's opinion of them as problems loosely but inseparably linked together for the English. The idea of a balance between coercion and conciliation is additionally conveyed in the stylistic balance of the phrase 'the former often vitiating the effectiveness of the latter'; and the irony present in policies that negated each other is emphatically brought out in the juxtaposition of phrases.

> Much of the argument about a political reaction turns not upon what we know of the eighteenth century, but upon what we know of the seventeenth. The eighteenth-century evidence which gave rise to the idea is not open to question; what is in doubt is the singularity of that evidence.[13]

Factually, all the historian needs to say (as he does later) is that in order to understand the reign of Louis XVI we need to go back in history to understand the reign of Louis XIV. The slightly paradoxical element in this point is effectively stressed, through an excellent use of literary artifice, in the style and language of these opening sentences.

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12. A. D. Kriegel: "The Irish policy of Lord Grey's government", English Historical Review, 86 (1971), 22.

13. William Doyle: "Was there an aristocratic reaction in pre-revolutionary France?", Past and Present, 57 (1972), 99.

It is also to be remarked how a deliberate striving for effect is not out of place in an "ordinary" historical article:

> The crisis of 1929 overtook a country which had not yet recovered from the terrible shock of the first war and where the secular demographic trend pointed to a declining and ageing population. It was at the last moment, in July 1939, that a sudden awakening, a realization of what this meant, found expression in the Family Code. It was the eve of the French collapse.[14]

As the conclusion of any literary piece the last sentence would have a quite dramatic effect; but in a work of written history it is in no way unhistorical because of this. Indeed, it has the important function of serving to remind us very effectively of the historical context of the events narrated in the article and their significance.

Finally -- to give one more example -- unlike any other "scientific" discipline, the use of the rhetorical question is a commonly-accepted device for the historian, even in the "standard" type of historical paper; and it provides a useful way in which the historian may make his point as he recounts events.

> The paternal pretensions of the Crown, even its benevolent despotism, encouraged people to think that whatever happened in the economy was the Crown's doing. Is it possible that the Parlements were expressing the discontent of a public suffering from the effects of economic events which they felt but did not understand and therefore blamed on the Crown? Is it possible that the economic crisis of 1770, like a great national headache, aggravated the quarrels between the royal government and the Parlements and had them at each other's throats? More investigation is needed to test

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14. Alfred Sauvy: "The economic crisis of the 1930s in France", Journal of Contemporary History, 4:4 (1969), 35.

this hypothesis; but it is a hypothesis strongly recommended by the circumstances.[15]

Now, it is true to say that part of the effectiveness of written history lies in the literary qualities of the historical account such as those which are hinted at in the comments above. The historian conveys facts not simply through bald factual statements (of a "scientific" type, perhaps) but also through careful manipulation of detail (which, in itself, may be largely non-essential). In consequence, literary ability and a choice of style are qualities which do more than help a historian to communicate well: they will, in fact, determine part of the actual content of what is communicated.

The intrinsic importance of style in history can be even more clearly seen when it is considered how the literary abilities of a historian may be abused. Whatever his similarities with the novelist in some respects, it is clear that in respect of one central consideration the historian must deal with his material quite differently. The novelist may, if he wishes, put himself entirely at the service of art, however that term "art" may be understood. He may hold that style is everything for him, and make it an overriding consideration in all his work; if he succeeds in what he tries to do, he will not be criticized on the ground that some other element of his novel should have been put first. No features of the novel itself, that is to say, can claim to have an intrinsic

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15. J. F. Bosher: "The French crisis of 1770", History, 57 (1972), 30.

right to be preferred above other features. Of course, claims on behalf of the features of an individual novel may be made by certain schools of thought with reference to principles such as that of "art for art's sake" or of "the social commitment of the artist". The historian, however, cannot set his own terms in this way; he has always to put factual truth first, and he cannot believe that his work is inviolable in its style and conception even though, perhaps, important new facts should come to light. And, less consciously, although a competent style is important, the historian must be very careful not to let his literary style "run away with him". The writer of history must always place his task as a historian before his task as an artist whenever these two (logical) roles may seem to be coming into conflict.

In a similar way the great historian's ability to use his literary qualities most effectively to bring out the truth and demonstrate an interpretation of the past will also enable him to use those qualities most effectively to hide the truth and gloss over what he has not understood or wishes to suppress. The literary devices used to enhance the truth can also be used to make distorted facts acceptable to an audience. More ordinarily, the literarily capable historian can efficiently disguise the gaps in his knowledge or comprehension of the past.

> Historians have developed a myriad of literary devices for gliding over what they do not adequately know or understand. With more schematic history, the gaps yawn embarrassingly wide; in narrative prose, they can be artfully concealed.[16]

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16. "The sense of the past" (unsigned), Times Literary Supplement, 2842 (1956).

To conceal in this literary fashion, however, is to mislead; and however creditable his literary abilities, the historian must not permit himself to use them to mislead his readers about historical truth. The function of literary style and language in history must always be a positive one; the historian must make use of his abilities as a writer as an adjunct to his purely historical capabilities, to help him express his thought more completely and communicate it more forcefully.

5. Individuality in the conception of a work

The central importance of artistic concepts for history is to be found in the creative synthesis of the whole. The writer of the finished historical narrative wants his work to be read not only as academic history by his colleagues but also as literature by a significant number of members of the lay public. This is rightly the case, for history uses ordinary language and ordinary concepts and talks to a great extent about occurrences of everyday life or about those "great happenings" of the past which immediately affected everyday life. By its very nature history is not abstruse; it does not, as the scientists do, deal with events that are often directly remote from ordinary living. And since it has no need of special language, the historical account will usually be conceived by the historian in such a way that he may make use of ordinary language to the greatest effect. The literary use of

ordinary language involves, as well as style, a dependence of the formulation of the whole at least in part on the creative process of the writer. As Miss Wedgwood writes:

> The creative process of the artist in history is obvious enough in that kind of history which is generally called literary history -- that is in history which is frankly designed to be read as literature. Literary history is concerned, and legitimately concerned, with conveying the writer's view of events to the reader with the greatest intensity. Many historians in the last two centuries have shown that history of this kind can also contain scholarship of great value. Several major works which were conceived and undertaken as works of literature and designed to appeal to the educated public as a whole were also works of significant and sometimes pioneer research. ...
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> All histories conceived as literature have this in common; that they are written about subjects of general interest. They deal with people and principles which are generally understood, with incidents interesting and dramatic in themselves. But there are many subjects which have to be studied and which ought to be studied, but which no historian could or should wish to turn into literary history. ... [T]hese things are of the greatest importance in the study of history, but very few of them can be adequately or even honestly treated in an essential literary manner. Writing about them is none the less an art, and a very different one; and some works in these highly unliterary subjects are most certainly literature.[17]

The literary and artistic conception of historical writing is a feature not only of the overtly literary history but even of more specialized and more limited historical works, of works that would not be instantly judged as "literature". For the most part the historian must make use of ordinary language and must consequently express himself well; for the most part he will be obliged to write a continuous piece of prose intended to be either descriptive or explanatory as a whole (and which, whatever

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17. "Art, truth and history", in Truth and opinion (London, 1960), 85-86.

the primary intent, is sure to mix description and explanation). He will therefore need to have an adequate conception of the literary side of his task.

The synthesizing conception of a course of events to be written about will be peculiar to each historian. It is the creation and conception of a single unified narrative that demands and makes ineliminable the individuality of the historian. The personality of the historian is all-important in that it is, as Professor Walsh has said, akin to the respect 'in which the personality of the novelist is vital: no one else has quite the same grasp and the same vision of the events to be narrated'.[18] History both by reason of the nature of its subject-matter and its medium and by reason of the working approach which it requires must inevitably contain a part of its author's individuality.

Because of the presence of literary style and conception a piece of written history can be subjected to a type of aesthetic or stylistic as well as merely factual criticism. And it will be found (as I have already suggested in the previous section) that criticism of an aesthetic or literary nature will elucidate the factual content of the narrative. The historian, in his partly literary undertaking, will not merely look at the facts to be recounted, and make simple, baldly explicit statements about them: he may suggest what happened through ellipsis, or the use of

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18. "The limits of scientific history", in Philosophical analysis and history, ed. William H. Dray (New York, 1966), 70.

sarcasm or irony, or by allowing some facts to remain implicit in his statements about others. Of course, some of the devices of novelists are not open to historians, for the latter may not deliberately mystify the reader, or leave certain things completely unsaid, or present a picture that is purposely partial or distorted, as, for example, a story that is wholly seen through the eyes of one of the characters alone. Consequently, some of the questions that might be asked by a person applying literary principles to history would be helpful with regard both to the factual and to the interpretive content of the narrative, although these questions would receive answers which would sometimes be on a more elementary level coming from a historical narrative than those coming from a modern novel, since history must in some ways be artistically limited by the necessity for factual truth. So it is that with regard to a historical account one can legitimately ask such questions as: What does the writer mean? Why are these two statements of fact placed in juxtaposition? What is the historian's attitude to this particular historical personage? The problems raised by such questions will not seldom be examined in much the same way in connection with a piece of history as with a piece of fiction or other self-conscious work of literature; and solutions and answers will also be of the same nature. Whereas with respect to a novel the answers will have a significance intrinsic only to the fictional narrative in question (and additionally, in some cases, to the author's biography and

his social context), they will, with respect to history, provide important additions to our factual knowledge of the past and a deeper understanding of it, since we shall find ourselves developing a fuller appreciation of the historian's own individual understanding. And such answers, as is often evident in the presuppositions of the original questions, may well directly have their foundation in our grasp of the way in which an individual historian carries out his work.

The individuality of a historian is finally made clear through a comprehension of his conception of history as this is expressed in his written account. Our comprehension will approach completeness only as we criticize history in an aesthetic and literary fashion as well as in a "scientific" and factual way. In history we must understand not only what is said but the way in which it is said. Or, in other words, we must understand the form of the narrative as well as its content.

6. The historian and his public

In what I have said in this chapter I have hoped to show that the need to present history as a continuous account in ordinary language leads to the historian's expression of his individuality in a historical work. So the question might fairly be asked: Need history be presented in the form in which it is usually presented at the moment? If such a question resulted from a belief that it is alone

the narrative form of history which necessarily entails an expression of the historian's individuality, it would be misguided. I have already demonstrated, I hope, that both values and understanding in history are closely linked with the personality of the historian. Nevertheless, the question might be asked by someone who felt that at least one "cause for offence" could be eliminated, that the removal of literary style and artistic conception from history could be at least one step towards the transformation of history into a purely factual science. Could history cease to be thought of as partaking at least of some of the qualities of literature?

To think that history could somehow cease to be literary at all is to mistake not only the subject of much of history but also some of the value of history, and to fail to realize completely for whom the historian is writing. With many other disciplines it is the case that the existence of a lay readership is a largely incidental state of affairs. With history, however, historians do not aim merely at writing for other historians: they are seriously determined that an important part of their audience should consist of members of the public who have a genuine interest in history (as many of us do) but who are not historians. And this is often a consequential consideration for them as they carry out their work. Their interest in a lay readership becomes very evident when we bear in mind that some of the output of many historians is directed primarily to the public rather than to their academic colleagues. And

what is very much more interesting here is that a great deal of this output cannot fairly be categorized as "popularization" in the slightly pejorative sense which that term has acquired in connection with works in some other disciplines, for "less academic" histories can also be studied profitably in many cases by professional historians. But even with much of their specialized work historians (and their publishers too) expect that some members of the lay public will be interested and that the work will be intelligible to those who are. As Louis O. Mink has written:

> Historians generally assume that they have a potentially universal audience, especially for the "comprehensive syntheses" at which they aim. With special exceptions, such as economic history and history of science, written history has not ordinarily supposed special information or training on the part of its readers. Of course, historians write for one another in the sense that they seek to meet professional standards of competence; but few historians have abandoned the hope of educating a general audience directly in the knowledge produced by their inquiries rather than of serving the lot of us indirectly by applying the results of their labors -- as does, say, a biologist or an econometrician.[19]

A programme of deliberate eradication of literary features in history would therefore seem perversely counter-productive. On its own it would produce no useful change regarding the content of the historical account; with other contentious factors still present, it would not resolve any supposed problems of objectivity, or generalization, or explanatory effectiveness. Such a programme could do harm to history by causing it to lose some of

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19. "The autonomy of historical understanding", ibid., 187-88.

that intelligibility that is provided by the artistic factors present in a historical narrative and manifested in its conception and arrangement; and it would also cause the loss of the greater part of an important audience, that audience which does not consist of professional historians and which is attracted to history, first by its subject-matter, but also, significantly, by the literary form of its presentation, and which would be immediately repelled or discouraged by history that was needlessly "dull". The literary and artistic aspects of history are a consequence of its universality, in subject-matter and treatment, but they have been greatly beneficial for the widespread study and influence of history. When individuals today are leading lives that are becoming increasingly specialized and have effectively lost touch with man's development and progress as a whole, the universal appeal of history that results from the attraction of its literary and artistic qualities is something to be encouraged and enhanced rather than destroyed.

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CONCLUSION

1. Objectivity in history

A treatment of the literary or artistic aspect of history makes clear that point at which the individuality of the historian is most evident in a historical account. It is through its literary features that a historical account is made complete not only in the determination of the form of presentation which a statement of factual knowledge and interpretation is to take but also in the provision to the historian of an ability to make an essential personal contribution to that statement. Individuality has a primary place in history because part of the very core of the idea of artistic conception and literary style is intimately bound up with the expression by an artist or an author of himself in his individuality. Given that the individuality of the historian is to be found at such a central point in historiography, what remains to be said about the possibility of objectivity in history?

Objectivity itself has never been clearly defined with one simple meaning. Obviously neither history nor the physical sciences can achieve the objectivity of a discipline like mathematics or logic, which, following the Cartesian criterion of objectivity, may deduce their

conclusions from self-evident axioms or unfold them from essences or definitions.[1] Objectivity for history must mean first that the historian attempts to discover and relate the factual truth about the past. Historians clearly do succeed in establishing factual truths that are accepted not only by their own coterie but by historians in general. A very large body of historical "facts" is established and accepted. In some matters, naturally, disagreement exists; and it may seem to figure largely in history, but only because historians, like many other people, tend to discuss the things about which they disagree rather than those about which they agree. In any case, disagreement will frequently be found to arise, much as it does in the sciences, not through subjective factors but through problems which are connected with the evidence and which are amenable to objective treatment. Similarly, the abandonment of past historical conclusions, where these are factual ones, is no evidence of an innate lack of objectivity in history (even if only in the work of the past) to any greater extent than it is in the sciences where old theories and conclusions are continually being overturned.

Mere factual objectivity need raise no problems in history at the lowest levels. It is in connection with explanation that problems of objectivity begin to be raised, and they become very evident in the wider context

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1. Conceptions of objectivity are usefully listed and penetratingly discussed with respect to history by J. A. Passmore in "The objectivity of history", Philosophy 33 (1958).

of interpretation. But demands for objectivity of interpretation along with objectivity of fact result from the elementary confusion of written history with history-as-actuality. Interpretation is determined by certain principles, but it is not determined by the same principles as the discovery and simple recounting of facts. Factual objectivity need not be compromised in theory by either valuational judgments (such as moral and aesthetic ones) or evaluative judgments (of significance, importance, or relevance, for example). Factual statements are inferred from the evidence, and they may be criticized according to the evidence available. Where it is believed that an interpretation has distorted or falsified the facts, appeal, again, may be made to the evidence. Only where factual hypotheses are in dispute, where the evidence to support a well-grounded conclusion is insufficient, will the acceptance or rejection of a particular interpretation be the basis of the acceptance or rejection of those hypotheses respecting facts of the past. But the frequency of such questionable factual hypotheses is much less than the problems they raise would seem to suggest. That factual statements may be established or refuted according to evidential inference which follows generally accepted methodological principles is the basis of objectivity in history.

The conclusions of historians, however, are not only factual but also interpretive. It must be readily admitted that interpretations of history manifestly and unequivocally differ one from another although they are frequently

based on the same established and accepted facts. Since the interpretation and understanding of historical events is, with their factual, supportive statements, central to many historical accounts, an interpretive statement cannot merely be dismissed as, for example, an aside by the historian to his readers. Yet, with no generally accepted interpretive principles, how are we to decide between conflicting interpretations? How are we to refute the relativist who complains that history fails to be objective because there are no rational grounds for finally preferring one historical reconstruction to another? Objectivity would seem to demand that there be a way of deciding between conflicting hypotheses of interpretation as well as between hypotheses of fact and factual inferences from historical evidence.

True historical interpretation, however, if it is considered entirely in itself, is not objective; and, what is more, it could not be objective. The very nature of interpretation in history logically precludes some type of objectivity that would be the equivalent of the objectivity that characterizes the concept of historical "fact". And there is no different type of supposedly objective interpretation that could be substituted for it, which would nevertheless allow the discipline of history to retain its present character. There are no ways of deciding between different interpretations of the same historical events as to which is the <u>correct</u> one in an absolute sense; but there are ways of choosing between interpretations and

deciding which is the most satisfactory one.[2] The most satisfactory historical explanation will not be the same for every individual, or every society, or every generation: what makes an interpretation satisfactory, and in what way it is satisfactory, will make clear the nature and purpose of historical interpretation and the reason that objectivity, with regard to interpretation itself, is not to be considered as -- unfortunately -- excluded or unattainable but as an inapplicable notion.

Interpretations do not have their existence in the past facts alone: they always relate to a particular problem, or a particular ideology or intellectual position, or even a particular lesson (among other possibilities). The relativist's point in this regard is quite correct; the relativist unfortunately sees the fusion of fact and interpretation in the historical account and believes that, because of this fusion, either factual content as well as interpretive content is always relative and thus subject to change, or, interpretation should have the same objective basis <u>there in the events</u> as factual propositions have. An interpretation is satisfactory according to the degree in which the facts can be understood to support it, and according to the extent to which the interpretation solves the historian's problem, proves the historian's thesis, or is accommodated to the historian's intellectual position. Great histories of the past are accepted and

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2. With regard to interpretation and any discussion of it, it is assumed that the facts underlying the interpretation are soundly established and not distorted in any way.

useful, not because their interpretation and understanding of their subjects somehow transcend the relativity of their writers' contexts, but because these contexts to which they were related are competently understood along with the histories themselves and indeed almost as an integral part of those histories. In these connections with the historian and his problems, the historical narrative shows that it is not simply an account of past and completed events but a living work which links the past with the present.

Historical interpretation cannot be objective because history is not merely a copy of the past. In history the historian is attempting to convey information and to communicate with his audience. A theory of history which holds that the historian "copies" the past is open to the same sort of criticism as the copy theory of art. For aesthetics Goodman offers us a succinct criticism of this theory:

> The copy theory of representation, then, is stopped at the start by inability to specify what is to be copied. Not an object the way it is, nor all the ways it is, nor the way it looks to the mindless eye. Moreover, something is wrong with the very notion of copying any of the ways an object is, any aspect of it. For an aspect is not just the object-from-a-given-distance-and-angle-and-in-a-given-light; it is the object as we look upon or conceive it, a version or construal of the object. In representing an object, we do not copy such a construal or interpretation -- we achieve it.[3]

In the representational aspect of his relation to the past and his evidence about it the historian considerably resembles the artist. In working on a historical account

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3. Nelson Goodman: Languages of art (London, 1969), 9.

the historian achieves an understanding of the past. The historian does not merely try to present some sort of inventory of past events: he selects and interprets, explains, highlights details, makes linkages, attempting for much of the time to give some worthwhile understanding of the whole. Interpretation is not something that is superimposed on the facts; nor is it something that is in the past to be recorded and related by the historian. The historian achieves his understanding of the past as he tells its story and through his telling of it. This understanding properly is created by, and belongs essentially to, the individual, and it is a concept for which the question of objectivity is inapplicable.

Historical objectivity is therefore a feature that is present <u>in</u> the historical account, rather than a characteristic <u>of</u> the account. It is incorrect, that is to say, to think of a piece of narrative history as something that can be objective without qualification. Rather, if we are concerned about objectivity, or the possible lack of it, on the part of a particular historian, we must engage in the activity of analysis with respect to a particular account, so that we may ascertain whether objectivity is present where we believe it should be. Objectivity is a characteristic of a particular stage of the historian's researches and of a particular stage in the historian's reasoning about his evidence. At a certain point, however, in his synthesizing work -- and many shorter or more basic written accounts may never reach this point, so that it

is not incorrect to talk of their objectivity as a whole -- the historian has moved beyond the requirements of objectivity; that he has done so should become evident when we reflect how difficult it is to see what kind of objectivity it might be that would characterize the finished historical narrative as a whole which presents us with an individual understanding of events. What we ask of the finished narrative -- and this presents us with the furthest limit of historical objectivity -- is that the historian be accountable to his evidence, that whatever else he may bring to bear on his work to enhance what he eventually presents to his public, it is brought to his work to serve that evidence.

2. Individuality and the point of studying history

An interpretation of past events and an understanding of them are created by the historian in the very activity of constructing and writing his account. In this intimate connection between the historian and his account is found the importance of individuality in history; the conception of a full-scale and finished historical work cannot fail to include its partaking of the historian's personality. This does not mean that the historian is necessarily conscious of his personal presence in his work, or that he approves of it, or even that he would accept it if it were brought to his attention; nevertheless, his individuality is necessarily to be found there. Individuality cannot be

excluded by claiming that the historical account is only socially determined and not personally or individually determined, that a historical interpretation is the consequence of a society's way of looking at things rather than the individual's. Interpretation has an important social basis, but in some cases its broad scheme, and in all cases its finer details, its nuances and its subtleties, are given to it by the individual historian. It is necessary to sum up precisely how individuality affects the historical account and its interpretation of the past, and how it can be compatible with objectivity.

Above all, individuality is bestowed on accounts of the past by what may be called the historian's general philosophy of life. This "philosophy of life" will determine at least the broad outlines of the historian's view of the present and of the past. Because the historian does not want to see nothing more than what happened in the past alone, but rather wants to understand how it happened and why it happened and to suggest to himself and to others what it all may have meant (and may still mean), there are always alternatives of interpretation open in history just as there are in everyday life. The historian sees the past as a <u>real</u> past; and so, as in his everyday dealings, he will believe or disbelieve declarations and promises, trust or distrust intentions and motives, accept or reject reasons and explanations; he will see actions as psychologically determined or freely chosen, and events as decided by men or by fate or by chance; he will in history

as in life be optimistic or pessimistic, credulous or cynical, practical or idealistic. The historian's philosophy of life will be manifested in the values implicit or explicit in his account, in what is deemed to be significant within a topic, in the explanations -- rational and causal -- offered and considered satisfactory; it will be shown in the mood and colouring of the account, in the style and tenor of the language, and indeed in the very topic chosen and the thesis that underlies it. Although in its broad outlines this "philosophy of life" will usually be a product of the historian's society, in its details it will ultimately be individually determined, just as the outlooks on the world even of individuals who may be considered to be socially close are often similar but rarely identical.

When such importance is granted to the historian's individuality, it might be thought that any objective elements in history would be totally overwhelmed, if indeed objectivity of any sort could still be held to be possible. But in so far as historical interpretation is truly individual, fact is not interpretation; and objectivity is a property of fact and not of interpretation in history. Objectivity can be a property of interpretation only when interpretation is fixed according to certain principles, as it is in science. There cannot be a standard scheme of interpretation in history because of the nature of historical subject-matter itself and the aims and purposes of historical study. Objectivity in history is limited to

the factual content of the narrative but it need not in any way be overlaid and obscured by interpretation.

In the ideal historical account factual objectivity can still be present. And a meaningful interpretation of the subject-matter of history requires principles which are not fixed but which are a product of the same individuality, characteristic of human nature, that also produced the events of the past. This interpretation ideally does not obscure the facts. It may be agreed with or disputed, but the facts interpreted can still be followed and, if necessary, identified in some plausibly "bare" state. That "bare facts" can be identified and separated, that an objective "substratum" of fact can be followed, cannot be disputed, even though the separation of fact from out of the account may effectively destroy the account as "history". Otherwise the possibility of historical objectivity could never be realized. But the real task is to identify where history can be objective, how it can be objective, and how its objective factual content is not to be compromised.

The inapplicability to history of a cold, scientific type of objectivity becomes clear when we reflect on what the aims of historical study are and why it is that we study history. We study history not as a discipline that is entirely apart from us but as one that is able to give us a knowledge of part of ourselves: indeed, in so far as history is a possession unique to mankind, it <u>is</u> a part of us. And that they bear a real significance for us is true even of the remotest parts of the past, for while these

clearly may have no direct relevance for us, they are inevitably relevant to a part of the past which does, as we might say, belong to us as our own.

History, if we take care to profit from our study of it, gives us knowledge of ourselves and our society. And here is the reason that history is not to be tampered with, here we may understand immediately why it is that the historian is to approach the past in its own right, and to study it as if for its own sake, for it is the attainment of the purest knowledge of ourselves that we should hold most dear, and in our acquisition of that knowledge that we should be most on our guard against deception.

If through history we gain knowledge of ourselves and our society, must we learn to use history as a source of instruction and profit? Does history teach us lessons? Is history some sort of tool that proves useful to us in the present? To ask such questions is to misunderstand fundamentally the nature of history and its place in the life of man. We learn lessons from, or through, a discipline which is generalized and formalized, in a body of knowledge which has been abstracted and is already apart from the empirical content of the experience to which it owes its origin. History is not abstracted from experience; it is <u>part of experience</u>. We learn from experience, although our experience does not generally "teach us lessons"; history does not teach us lessons, but we can learn from it all the same.

3. Closing remarks

In this thesis I have intended to put forward a view of one way in which historical studies can be satisfactorily carried out and historical accounts written. That is to say, a historical account with a single cohesive conception in continuous prose written by a single historian from an individual point of view is able to give us a fully satisfactory account of the past. More, I have been trying to argue that this is the fundamental way in which we should approach the historical past. Of course, it is not the only way in which we may -- quite legitimately -- look at the past. And indeed it is difficult to know how one might set about prescribing the one absolutely pre-eminent way in which the human past is to be treated. One can only say that the human past should be dealt with in terms proper to humanity; and perhaps it is this -- the diversity of human nature and knowledge -- that is the source of the diversity of man's views of his past and his approach to the study of it.

If it is true that history can properly be approached in different ways, there is one major philosophical comment still to be made. It does not seem that "history" should be thought of as a concept that can be made precise in a single, unitary definition. "History", we must say, is one further example of an open-textured concept, with instances of which we are now familiar in philosophy. And if it is the case that no single definition can be given

completely of "written history", it is also the case that no single "element" or "feature" can be held to be necessarily or essentially a part of it, except that it may be said -- in the end, one feels, a little lamely -- that its subject is man's past. We cannot fairly say that written history ceases to be history because it is not a descriptive account, or because it is not cast in narrative form, or because it does not evaluate or explain. It is consequently impossible to prescribe finally how the historical past is to be examined and treated. For sound academic history, certainly, one may rule out, for example, an unhindered exhibition of prejudice or an inhibited use of a biased judgment. There is still, all the same, no single definitive and established methodology or content for "history". History is the story of man's past, but it is a story that can be told in more than one way.

APPENDIX A

History and anthropology[1]

In saying that history tells us about the life of man in society, it may not be clear how history is adequately to be differentiated from some forms of anthropology. I have shown in this dissertation how history is concerned with the particular, but anthropology too often deals with particular societies and particular cultures. In order, therefore, to separate history from anthropology we must concentrate on the distinction between the real and the abstract.

Anthropology, it has been claimed, is the most comprehensive of the academic disciplines dealing with mankind. Although its subject-matter often overlaps with the subject-matter of other disciplines, the core of anthropological interest is to be found in the description and explanation of similarities and differences between ethnic groups; thus, one of its aims is, through its investigation of features common to different cultures, to bring out the basic overall characteristics of human nature. Overlapping to a degree with history we find such studies as those of cultural anthropology, which attempts to discover behavioural characteristics, and to describe the processes of stability, change, and development in different human

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1. See chap. II, sect. 2.

societies; social anthropology, which aims at understanding and explaining the diversity of human behaviour by a comparative study, over a wide range of societies, of social relationships and processes, and at providing understanding by precisely defining and describing behavioural connections within societies; and -- a most recent formation -- political anthropology, which aims at formulating general statements and hypotheses about the nature and conditions of political processes and their relations to other social phenomena, dealing with such concepts as change, faction, and party, and which includes comparative politics, the study of the forms of political organization together with their properties, variations, and modes of change.

In the brief summaries of some of those studies which seem to overlap with history it is important to notice the constant occurrence of abstractions, and the pride of place that is given to abstract concepts. Indeed, in anthropology descriptive accounts serve to illustrate certain abstract schemes of relationships and behavioural connections, or to act as source-material from which such schemes can be derived. Cultural anthropology, for example, is concerned only initially with the externals of any cultural features, and is mainly interested in an analysis of the role of those features in the sociocultural system of which they form a part. What matters in anthropology is in the end not the people who are talked about, but the relationships believed to be <u>behind</u> or <u>underlying</u> their

lives -- not the real and concrete, but the abstract. What matters is not the individual but his place in a certain "scheme", and the manner in which that individual and his relationships are to be defined and connected with other individuals and other relationships. The true subject-matter of anthropology is abstracted and schematized behaviour and a stylized network of functions and relationships. And even such a world of abstractions is not to be considered in its own setting in the way that a historical individual is; by means of his abstractions the anthropologist attempts to consider particular problems within a framework that embraces the human species as a whole.

Although many branches of anthropology deal with the particular, which, as the concrete particular, is otherwise the subject of history, they deal with it from an entirely different point of view, and with entirely different aims in mind. If they aim at describing the particular, it is a particular that is not real but, rather, abstracted and conceptualized, or one that at least, it is hoped, will prove itself a basis for some abstract scheme. Beyond the description of the particular in any branch of anthropology lies an analysis in terms of behaviour, relationship, and function, even though that analysis must sometimes remain temporarily unaccomplished in the present. History, however, wishes in the end to deal only with what is individual and particular in its own right. For history the so-called "feature" or

"characteristic", as it exists in its concrete reality, is the main object of interest. Written history is an account of individual facts, of real events and actions; and although much may be said about the facts of history by the historian, it is primarily to the real existence of events and actions and individuals in their own right that the historian gives first place.

APPENDIX B

Individualism and holism[1]

Historians make frequent and unquestioning use of holistic concepts such as "England". Indeed, such concepts are to be counted among the central concepts of history, and a narrative which seemed to be deliberately excluding them in its consideration of subject-matter in which they would normally be found would present us with a strange sort of historical account. Yet, however soundly established an entity like England may be for historians, such entities still present a problem that is widely discussed by philosophers. The question whether such entities are reducible to simpler elements, whether they are a kind of methodological shorthand, is not strictly central to my own argument in this thesis. Any serious discussion of it would have to examine in detail the very complicated question of the opposition of individualism and holism. It should be sufficient to say that all historians make extensive use of holistic entities, that it would be impossible on pragmatic grounds alone for them to do otherwise, and that, given the way we think and speak, the use of holistic entities would seem to be necessary for historical understanding. History can only be understood if entities like England are admitted as basic, together,

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1. See chap. VIII, sect. 2.

of course, with statements that use them, such as "England declared war on Germany".

It should be accepted that such entities as "England" or "Germany" are not real in the way that tables and chairs and individuals are real; but neither are they reducible to such "real" entities. "England" is a social concept -- and here the word "social" is to be understood in a very wide sense as referring to man's life in society in general. The social is not reducible to the physical; the holistic is not reducible to the individual. The holistic takes its meaning from the social order, and to reduce it entirely to the individual is to abolish the social context from which it takes its meaning. Partial reductions are always possible, for in their case part of the social (holistic) context is retained, and this continues to supply a proper meaning; but it is a mistake to think that because all kinds of partial reductions are possible, full reductions must be possible at least in principle. The individual devoid of a holistic setting is no more than a physical (and psychological) individual; the social has been abolished.

A further argument in support of holism is that it is not at all clear how some partial reductions could ever be satisfactorily completed. If a statement like "England declared war on Germany" is analysed, perhaps, into something like "The British Ambassador in Berlin on the authority of the Prime Minister and King delivered a note containing an ultimatum to the German Foreign Chancellery,

etc. ..." it can only be pointed out that no satisfactory reduction has taken place here: the Prime Minister, for example, is not meant here simply as an individual but as the Prime Minister of England. In this context, who the particular individual was who happened to be Prime Minister at the time is not significant (except in so far, naturally, as his individual personality affected his official behaviour). What the "Prime Minister of England" signifies is only to be understood in other institutional (holistic) terms, and thus it is not completely reducible. So far in the example above, there has been no reduction at all, for to reduce an action of England to the behaviour of a person acting on the authority of the Prime Minister of England leaves the concept of "England" still present in the so-called reduction.[2]

Neither reduction in terms of contemporary individuals nor reduction in terms of the history of a concept can ever eradicate holistic terms satisfactorily, that is, in such a way that the genuine social meaning of a holistic term is left intact. Nor should it be forgotten -- whatever the logical possibilities presented by analysis may be -- that holistic terms are a genuine part of our way of thinking, and even of the thought of those who deny, for example, that a concept like "their country" can have any power over them on the ground that it is meaningless, for the argument that supports their denial is not seldom

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2. Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum: "Societal facts", in Theories of history (New York, 1959), where an illustration involving banking is used.

constructed in such a way that it succeeds in using the concept quite meaningfully.

To point out that entities like England (in its historical sense) are not real does not entail that they are to be seen as subjective concepts or abstractions. It means that they are not physically real or of the same order as physical objects or real individual persons. They are irreducibly simple concepts, or reducible to simple concepts of the same order; they have their meaning as part of the social order, and not as part of the physical order. They are analysable, that is to say, in terms of man's ordering of his social life, and in terms of concepts like offices, powers, duties, and so forth. To point out that a declaration of war is the act of some individual is to make an inappropriate, and so erroneous, reduction -- it is the act of some individual in a socially, and holistically, defined capacity, and the act will often be defined in terms of a capacity which has its being in the selfsame holistic concept which was the original object of reduction. The act of the individual, as "Prime Minister", for example, must be defined in terms of an office which ultimately is an office having a meaning and significance dependent on the concept of "England". And the concept of "England" has an existence that is part of the social order, in this case, because the holder of the office will find that the concept is one of the principal determinants of his actions. The resulting statements of a possible reduction (if we assume for a moment

that a reduction is possible in theory) might well not be accepted as determinants of action by him because they would not possess the same connotations as the original holistic concept. Reduction seems to be talked of only in terms that suggest the denotation alone of a concept is to be retained, or rather, clarified and simplified. Yet it is the connotation of a concept, and especially of a holistic concept, which is often more significant for the individual, at least in motivating thought and action. And it is doubtful that even the whole denotation of a concept -- when this is understood to include the social as well as the physical denotation -- would be retained after the hoped-for successful reduction.

"England", therefore, is an abstraction in terms of the physical order, but it has an effect in the physical order and defines the physical lives of individuals because it is a reality of the social order. The statement "England declared war on Germany" defines what is in effect a very simple change in the social order of the world. An attempted reduction of that statement to a statement about concrete individuals is both very complicated and, in the end, questionably successful, for reduced statements would only seem to be intelligible when their holistic counterpart is given as a translation or exegetical aid, or when we are already acquainted with the holistic original; in addition, it does not effect a genuine reduction because it destroys the meaning of the original statement, which can only be understood in social (holistic)

terms and not in individual terms. It may make sense very often to reduce some of the holistic to the individual level, but, on the other hand, since a movement from the complex to the simple must surely be classed as a reduction (for some purposes), it can make sense to reduce some complex individual statements to simple social statements of a holistic type.

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